·STORIES OF LIFE·LOVE·
and

UNE

15 CENTS

Adventure

Another
AN WHEELER
Story
CRIMSON CHAMBER"
Complete Book-Length Novel
DR. JOHN I. COCHRANE

ALBOT MUNDY
"THE DOVE
H A BROKEN WING"
A Tale of India

R KNOWLES RETIRES"
Business and Humor

REFORMATION OF
CARABAO"
erican Soldiers, Philippines

E TEN-CENT HEAD"
Baseball

HE WHIP-HAND"
By THOMAS ADDISON

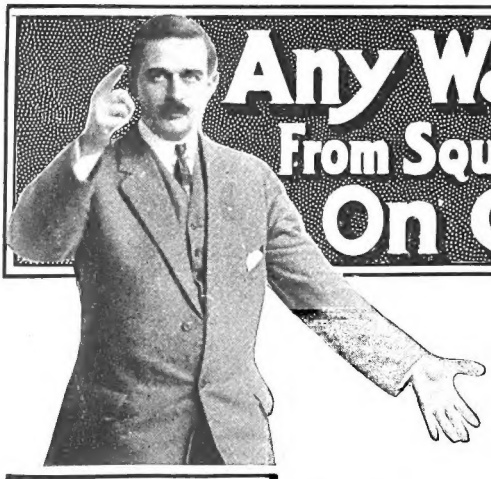
Y TAKES A HAND"

O OF NAGASAKI"

HE MAN-TRAIL"

THE UNIVERSITY
OF
FEE
THE LIBRARY

Digitized by Google



Any Watch You Want From Square Deal Miller On CREDIT

Waltham
Hamilton
Howard
Elgin
Illinois, Seth-Thomas, Rockford

I SMASH THE TERMS!

I have well earned My title of "Terms Smashing Miller." No catalog published offers **Any Make of Watch You Want** on as Easy and as Liberal Credit Terms as the New Book sent to you Free for your name and address.

Your Choice of Inlaid Enamel Cases

30 Days Free Trial—No Money Down
Express Prepaid in Advance by Me

That is the test that tells. Suppose you want a watch? Any make, any grade, any size, any case. I have it for you—just the watch that you want. **No Money Down,** Express Prepaid. You can try any one of America's best known timepieces for 30 Days. **A Free Trial, a Full Month to Carry It in Your Pocket.**

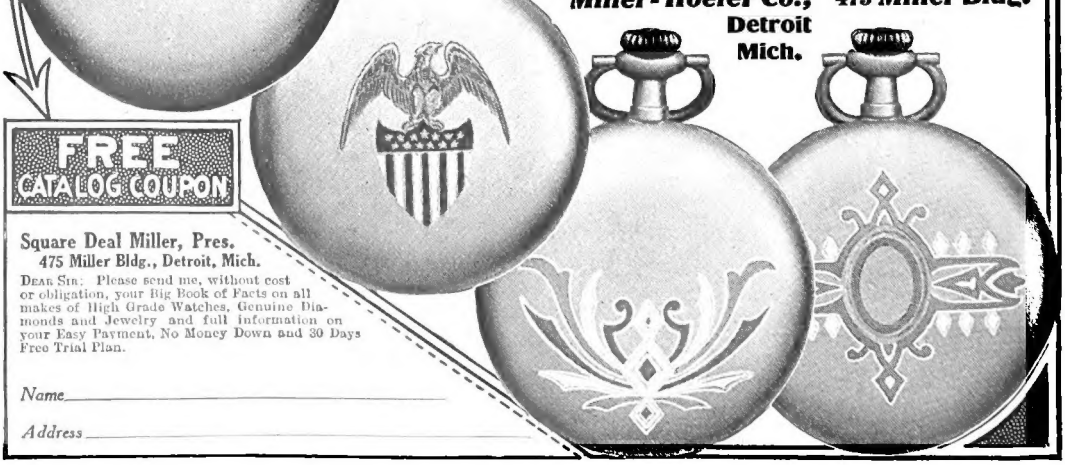
An Open Account—No References Demanded

The same kind of credit you get from your grocer liberally and cheerfully given. Arrangements are made for an Open Account as soon as you write. No red tape, no publicity, notes or collectors. Every transaction is strictly confidential on terms made to suit you.

Send Coupon for Watch and Diamond Book

Why You Should Have This Book. It is the Encyclopedia of watches; a Dictionary explaining watch words; a History of Watch Making in America; the only Index Book of a **Good Watch** and an Absolute Authority on Watch Buying. Use a postcard, a letter or the convenient coupon. Know **Facts** on **All** makes of watches before buying anywhere. This book is a Key to watch buying. It tells you how to judge a good watch. Write for it today and get a letter from Square Deal Miller that makes you a friend for life.

Square Deal MILLER, Pres.
Miller-Hoefer Co.,* 475 *Miller Bldg.
Detroit
Mich.



FREE CATALOG COUPON

Square Deal Miller, Pres.
475 Miller Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

Dear Sir: Please send me, without cost or obligation, your Big Book of Facts on all makes of High Grade Watches, Genuine Diamonds and Jewelry and full information on your Easy Payment, No Money Down and 30 Days Free Trial Plan.

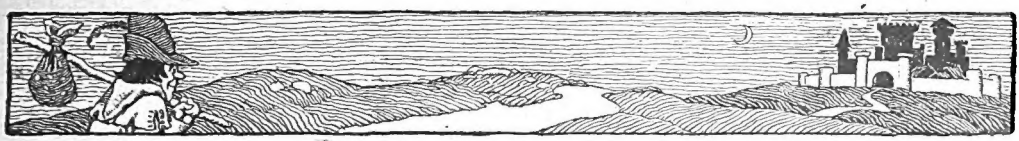
*Name*_____

*Address*_____

Digitized by Google

Adventure

Vol. 10
No. 2



Published by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

ERMAN J. RIDGWAY, President — RAY BROWN, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Sts. - - - New York City
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered at the New York Post-Office as Second-Class Matter

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Managing Editor

Contents for June 1915

Cover Design . . . . . ***Francis Miller***

The Crimson Chamber ***A Complete Novel*** . . . . . **J. I. Cochrane, M. D.** 3

Sled Wheeler, virile, fearless, masterful, with all the underworld at his command, grapples with a sinister power so tremendous that it threatens to bring even this famous man-handler to his knees—a power that holds the wealth of America in its grasp, terrified, while it plans deliberately the destruction of New York. Most of you remember *Sled Wheeler*, also *Doctor Corbin*, who is with him in this greatest of their adventures. Then there's a girl whose beauty and accomplishments have taken the city's breath. But the ruthless hand of power descends and is crushing her—then *Wheeler* opens fire. One of the really big stories of the year.

The Black Bass ***Poem*** . . . . . **John Mätter** 101

Sandy Takes a Hand ***A Story of Sandy Bourke*** . . . . . **J. Allan Dunn** 102

Of the cow country is *Sandy*, as you know, if you met him in the May issue. Cupid and the cards now lead this son of the range to uncover the cleverest "I'il poker trick" of the season.

Pluck ***Poem*** . . . . . **C. Hilton-Turvey** 112

The Reformation of Carabao . . . . . **Robert J. Pearsall** 113

When the lure of raw gold gripped a soldier on a steaming, stinking, lonely hike through the jungles of northern Luzon.

The Whip Hand . . . . . **Thomas Addison** 120

A girl held it, and her hand could lash a Governor from office.

The Dove With a Broken Wing . . . . . **Talbot Mundy** 127

This bird was the dove of peace which, in the opinion of Tommy Atkins, had roosted too long on the India branch of Great Britain's tree of Empire. So the dove was stoned off its limb, thereby greatly benefiting two of England's keepers of the peace.

The Ten-Cent Head . . . . . **Octavus Roy Cohen** 140

A ten-thousand-dollar arm went with the head. But the head belonged to a bush-league recruit, on whom depended the deciding game of a major league pennant race. Whereupon the busher springs "some frame-up."

The Love of Men . . . . . **Nevil G. Henshaw** 146

The testing of a man in the face of black, Louisiana swamp-death.

(Continued on next page)

Digitized by Google

(*Continued from preceding page*)

Fugo of Nagasaki . . . . . **Donald Francis McGrew** 152
When Jap wrestler met American soldier-pugilist there was "nothing to it" for one—which do you think it was?

Square All 'Round . . . . . **A. E. Dingle** 158
A tale of Australia in the convict days—thrilling, forceful, real.

Peter Knowles Retires . . . . . **Clinton H. Stagg** 164
Is a man of eighty too old to run his own business? The relatives of *Peter Knowles* think so. He shows them, and comes near painting the whole town green.

Snapshotting War With Jimmy Hare *An Article* . . . . . **Robert Wells Ritchie** 178
Some of the vivid, thrilling adventures of the famous war photographer, Jimmy Hare, in Cuba and Manchuria.

That Which Is Written . . . . . **William Patterson White** 183
All was not comedy when a sentimental Scotsman, with an eye for beauty, mixed into the family affairs of the *Pasha of Dar el Dana.*

The Man-Trail *A Four-Part Story. Part III.* . . . . . **Henry Oyen** 188
You have already felt the blood of this young North Woods giant, *Jack Peabody*, leap to its fight against *Bull Bart* and the Lumber Trust, if you have followed his winning struggle to prove himself worthy of his name. If not, get into the story through the synopsis. There's a real, red-blooded daughter of the North who wants to meet you, too. She's irresistible.

The Camp-Fire **A Meeting-Place for Readers, Writers and Adventurers** 216

The American Legion 218

Headings . . . . . ***Will Crawford***

In the next issue (July) of ADVENTURE begins a splendid tale by

TALBOT MUNDY

A three-part story of the fascinating and mysterious *Yasmini,* of Ranjoor Singh, of India, and of the beginnings of the great war—

"The Winds of the World"

In the same issue you will find, among other good things: "THE RED LAW," A COMPLETE NOVELETTE of the West, by JACKSON GREGORY; "THE COWARD," a story of the Boer War, by W. TOWNEND; "A GAMBLE IN GEESE," a tale of Dawson days, by SAMUEL ALEXANDER WHITE; "THE MONKS OF ST. METHODIUS," a Balkan adventure by the author of "THE SINEWS OF WAR," ARTHUR D. HOWDEN SMITH; "THE RESURRECTION PEDDLER," a humorous tale of a humorous promoter, by CLINTON H. STAGG," and—but turn to "The Trail Ahead" on page 224 of this number.

Issued monthly. **Yearly Subscription, $1.50 in advance.** **Single copy, fifteen cents.**
Foreign postage, $1.00 additional. Canadian postage, 30 cents.

Trade-Mark Registered; Copyright, 1915, by The Ridgway Company in the United States and Great Britain.

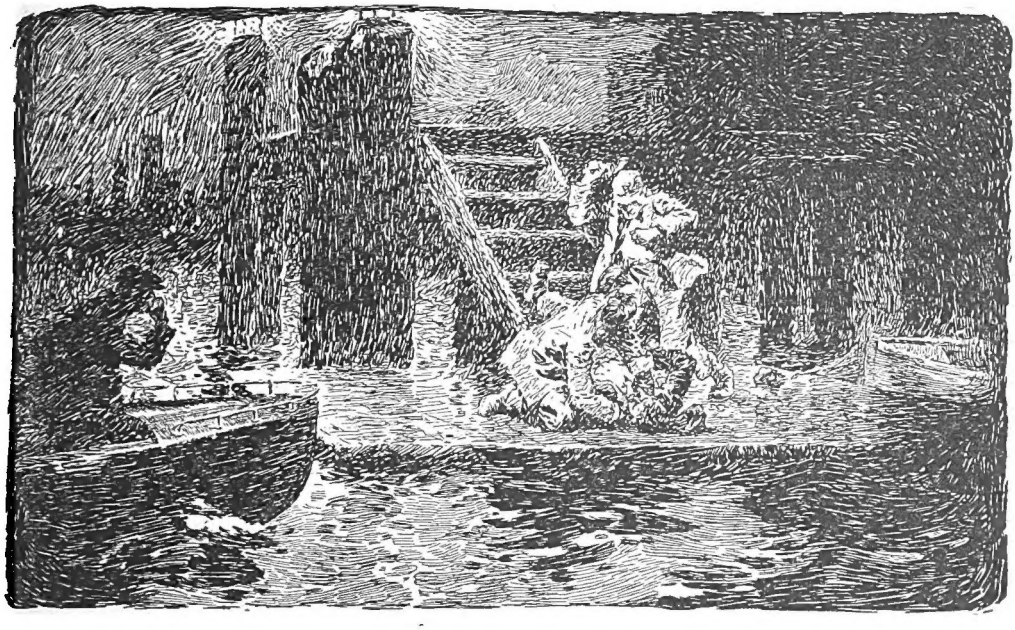
The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

Digitized by Google

Adventure

Registered in the United States Patent Office.

JUNE
1915
Vol. 10
No. 2



The CRIMSON CHAMBER

A Sled Wheeler Story

COMPLETE BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL

By J. I. COCHRANE, M. D.

Author of "The Crook and the Doctor," "Cupid and the Crook," etc.

MANY a wide-eyed enthusiast has cried: "You *must* write that up! Why don't you make a book of that?" The book did not appear because the facts in cold chunks as they fell seemed to me too thick to swallow, either as facts or fiction, and pointed to a scheme too threatening and absurd. But since the peace-movement in Europe has come to such glorious fruition, it throws a different light on some of the happenings in question.

It was in Mac's room at the Post Clinic Hospital in the early days of the Spanish

Copyright, 1915, by The Ridgway Company. All rights reserved.

Digitized by Google

War that I met Blain Castleman of Kentucky, and thereupon events took place. Having just come back to New York after being thrown out of the Government exam's for Assistant Surgeons, U. S. A., I was the most heartsick young M. D. in Manhattan on that hot June evening. I had no heart to read the extras, or to listen to street-car prophets shouting what the Spanish destroyers would do to us.

I was a tramp—had no place or part in the busy rush. I had thrown up my position as Penitentiary Physician when I went to Washington, so sure was I of the army place. Now I had to find a place where I might sleep for nothing. Eating was not to be thought of. My only refuge was MacDonald, my room-mate at the Southern University, now House Surgeon at the elegant new Post Clinic. I must swallow my pride and tell him of my failure.

Dragging my suit-case up the blistering granite steps and along the cool marble halls pungent with the familiar ether and antiseptics, I half expected to be turned into the streets for a vagrant. But I only met Miss Kelly, head nurse of Ward Two, with a supper-tray, and her smiling, "Evening, Doctor," made her look like a white-linen angel. At the door marked "House Surgeon," with Mac's written card below, I entered without knocking.

Stripped to shirt and duck trousers, Mac sat with feet on the table, reading a yellow-back, smoking cigarettes and eating tobacco, relaxing after a hard day in the operating ampitheater. He looked bigger, more darkly handsome than ever as he looked up, spurted a center-shot into the grate and rumbled:

" 'Lo, Cohbin! 'S matter, th' exam's?"

"The exam's are all right—going on right now—but I was thrown out, first off—on the physical!"

Mac stopped chewing and waited. I went on:

" 'Athlete's heart' they said—I can lick the whole Board of Examiners before breakfast—but that settles it. I am out of it for good. Tomorrow I make tracks for the Vermont woods, soon as I can get my things from the Pen, and I got just cash enough for my ticket home. Can I sleep on your couch?"

I sat on the couch in question and dropped my chin in my hands. Mac rolled his cud and growled placidly:

"Woods—nothin'! Peel off yo' collah an' rest yo' feet. Have suppeh d'reckly." As he turned back to his book he rumbled on. "Told yo' yo' didn't want in that Gove'nment se'vice, anyhow!"

Although we had roomed together, and together raided New York hospital positions, I had never got inside Mac's rough bark and he knew little of my home affairs. Now, shaken out of all reticence, I broke out bitterly:

"Oh, no! I didn't want in that service, nor I didn't want the sure pay that went with it! Mac—listen! I have got to go home, now, and tell the folks I have failed. That means the old place will go on the mortgage; that is all we got to show for my education—that's what they get for pinching and saving for me! I am all they have got to keep them out of the poorhouse in their old age. For they are old and tired, Mac—tired working for me. I can see their hands tremble with anxious fear when they see me; I can smell the special pie baking in the oven for the conquering hero —that's *me*, Mac! And I have got to tell 'em I have failed!"

I had shoved hands in pockets and walked to the window where I stood staring down into the avenue with unseeing eyes. When I had gone thus far in my Jeremiad I was startled by the clatter of Mac coming to his feet and dropping his pipe on the hearth.

"Look yeh, Cohbin! I sweah I neveh knew—I ce'rnly thought yo' had money, with yo' millionaire cousins in the city, an' all. Hyeh I been lettin' yo' pay fo' feeds, theateh tickets an' things—an' my fatheh with all kinds o' money kicks because I don't spend enough. Yes he does! How much is that doggawn mawgage, anyhow? Yo' sit right down hyeh an' write."

Staring in astonishment, I saw Mac break his unprecedented flow of talk to pounce upon a letter that lay on the table before him.

"My king! That came the day yo' left, an' I clean fo'got it! Read what they say! We'll fix this yeh mawgage business, straight-off! Man, they's money waitin' fo' yo' in this city, right now. Talk about goin' to the woods—but read yo' letteh!"

And Mac subsided, to pace the floor with an occasional rumbled, "Yo', an yo' *'woods'!*" while I opened the letter from home.

Digitized by Google

By the last sunset light I read the familiar clear script, looking for nothing more than pathetic good wishes for my success. I read the first paragraph over to make sure, and the world took on a new look—I was a new man on the spot. For the first paragraph was an announcement that the dream of three generations of Corbins had come true—the quarry lot was sold, and for a price that meant lifelong security for the folks at home on the old Corbin homestead. With the cash already in bank, their first thought was to send me a check, but with wet eyes I swore solemnly never to touch one cent more that I did not earn myself.

Then I raised my head with a huge breath to look on the great world of men and things—a glorious place to live in!

Now the sun had gone and a breath of new air came up from the freshly sprinkled avenue below—a cool moist breath, carrying the smells and sounds of the big city I had already learned to love. Down there in the old avenue the children were coming out for their evening's play, tired men were going home from their work.

Never had New York looked so good to me, and I was free to stay now and do my part! I turned to look back into the room and saw Mac's dejected back where he stood staring down at his bed in sympathetic gloom. Who would have suspected old Mac of such ready sympathy and generosity? He had always seemed rather suspicious of Northern sharpness, and had never loosened up a nickel's worth. For the first time I felt I had got next to the man.

"Mac, yo' ol' Rebel!" I called sharply. "Yo're shore goin' to get mussed up a whole lot! Watch out!"

Before he had time to do more than turn a blank face over his broad shoulder I struck him amidships in a long diving tackle. We went down together on his bed, and that piece of hospital furniture, not being designed for such doings, promptly collapsed. We were still wriggling, gouging and punching in the ruins, Mac meanwhile rumbling in staccato double-bass: "Jus' lemme get—one good holt. Bus' yo' wide open! Doggawn crazy cuss!" when a smooth gentlemanly voice, a Southern-gentlemanly voice sounded above us.

"Gentlemen! Oh, hush! But this is lovely! Let me in on the debate. How many in this yeh mess, and what's the subject undeh discussion? Come on out o' that, Mac, you old pirate, and do yo' pretties'! This is simply *bound* to be Dr. Corbin. Glad to know yo, seh, mighty glad. My name's Castleman, from Kentucky!"

I FOUND myself on my feet shaking hands with the famous Castleman of Louisville. At the University I had heard his name whispered with respectful admiration, even with awe. At twenty-five he was the hero of three formal duels, as well as other vivid episodes, out in the cow-country and at the University itself. His smile was brilliantly winning, his handsome face alight with the keen emotions it expressed. Although delicate almost to girlishness, his features struck me instantly with their thoroughbred power.

The delightful smile he gave me vanished on the instant. He turned to Mac with sudden severity and, assumed though it was, the look in his steel-blue eyes and around his thin lips was startling, cruel, as he demanded—

"What is the meaning of this unseemly violence, seh!"

"Damfino!" Mac rumbled, as he sat up on the edge of his mattress and scratched his big black head. "Hyeh comes this yeh maniac an' pulls some sob-stuff about the 'Ol' Folks at Home' goin' to the po'house, all because he gets thrown out o' the Govvernment army exams! I give him a letteh from home, an'—wow—wow! Go awn 'way f'm yeh, yo' paih o' lunatics! Yo're a team long-lookin'-fo'-each-otheh. Go get yo' fool selves shot, or in jail, an' don't be botherin' me!"

At Mac's mention of my troubles at home, the Kentuckian's quick look of inquiry had sought my face; then, reassured by my answering grin, he resumed his stage dignity until Mac finished his denunciation.

"Very well, your Majesty, so be it!" He bowed coldly to Mac. "Then all is over between *us!* Dr. Corbin, seh, it remains but for us to withdraw from the Presence. I take it his Majesty has informed you of my quest and hope that you will honor my humble abode?"

"What's this all about?" I looked to Mac for enlightenment.

"Yo' turn first." Mac went to the mirror to tidy himself for the evening meal and grumbled over his shoulder, "What was in that letteh, anyhow—loco weed?"

Digitized by Google

"That letter, Mac—" I picked up the sheets from the floor to wave them in exultation—"says they've sold the quarry lot, paid off the mortgage and want to send me a check. That letter means I am free to stay in New York if I can make my board and lodging, somehow. For I hereby and hereupon most solemnly swear I will take not one cent I have not earned! I call you both to witness."

"Don't talk so much!" Pulling at his tie, Mac interrupted my flow gruffly. "Yo' best move is to see Dan about gettin' back to the Pen. That'll keep yo' fo' a while, anyhow. But hyeh's Castleman been waitin' fo' yo' to get back. He's got some kind o' snipe-hunt up his sleeve, but he's mighty mysterious about it. Maybe he's goin' to offer yo' a fat salary."

"But Mac! Stop your foolishness! I got to sleep somewhere tonight, and now you have busted your bed. If you sleep on the couch——"

"Gentlemen, hush!" Castleman interposed with a lofty gesture. "Let me pour oil on the waters, and let us pour libations in thanks! For the Army Board of Examiners never did a better job than when they turned down a certain Jas. Corbin, M. D.!"

He turned to me seriously.

"Doctor, Mac has let out one fact and made a fair shot at another with eyes shut. I have been waiting for you to get back—for good reasons Mac, here, wouldn't understand—and I have Mrs. Cary's whole second floor.

"You know Mrs. Cary, on Gramercy Park? Well, the front bedroom has been waiting for you for three days, and I'm as homesick as a lost hound. Don't be in too much of a hurry to get back into prison, will you?"

He had a trick of raising one eyebrow in earnest question, and his intent seriousness was convincing.

"It sounds too good to be true," said I. "Mac and I had the big attic bedroom at Mrs. Cary's our first month in New York. I never aspired to her star suite, but if you're sure it won't——"

"This is your bag?" asked Castleman as he up-ended my suit-case before the half-open door and sat on it. Then he called out cheerfully: "Mac, fasten the windows! Dr. Corbin, seh, you're my prisoner. Will yo' go quietly or in ir— I *beg* your pardon, ma'am! All my fault!"

HE PICKED himself up and swept a graceful bow to Miss Kelly, now blushing beautifully in the doorway.

"Don't mention it!" She flushed redder and hurried to explain to Mac. "I saw your door open and thought you were alone, Doctor. I—it's about that little chap in Four. He's not in so much pain, and he's trying to be brave, poor baby, but his mother didn't come as she promised—playing bridge, probably—and it's the hardest time now, from dark until he goes to sleep. He doesn't cry or ask for anything for the pain; he just says if he had 'somefin' to p'ay wif!' I—it's too much for me." She swallowed hard.

"Uh-huh!" rumbled Mac. "Give him some 'Ward Anod.' Number Two! I'll be right in and tell him some more o' those lies—they put him to sleep last night. That mother o' his——"

"Oh, thank you, Doctor! He'll be *perfectly* happy if you come, but he did not dare ask! But I'm going to bring up a tray and see you don't miss your dinner, like last night."

With a tell-tale look from her handsome eyes she vanished.

"Mac," said Castleman severely, "you tell that gyerl you're engaged! You hear me?"

"None o' yo' business! Out o' hyeh, yo' two maniacs! Go get yo'selves soused an' pinched! I hope the 'Man f'm Denver' shoots yo' fool head plumb off yo' shouldehs! I got no time to botheh with yo'!"

"Leave him to his head nurse and his fairy tales, Doctor!" Castleman took my arm and my bag. "We'll go about a man's business. The man follows his bag! Follow yours and you'll never be sorry."

On our way through the lighted halls I noticed that the Kentuckian was thoughtful.

"Mac's a fine old grizzly," he said at length. "But he sure ought to tell that gyerl he's engaged. He tells stories to the four-year-old getting over appendectomy out of the kindness of his heart and never thinks whether the gyerl's going to cry herself to sleep or not. It's not fair."

I was watching the play of his sensitive features, thinking they showed a nature with a wide keyboard, when with one of his quick side looks he caught me.

"Thinking I don't look the part?" he asked with his thin-lipped smile. "Do I

Digitized by Google

look too much like a Miss Nancy to have shot two men in duels? And do I look like I might lead you into trouble?"

"Well—" I felt a flush burning my face—"I have seen your type before—it doesn't fool me any more. But as to leading me, there must be some reason for your waiting for me besides lonesomeness. And you must admit your hospitality was—rather sudden. Nevertheless, I have felt from the start as if you were just like home folks—as if I had always known you—and I am willing to take a chance on anything that you see fit to get mixed up in."

"Thank yo'!" Castleman's sharp brevity, with a rare color in his pale cheeks, showed his warm feeling. "That's what I call a real compliment—what you've heard us down South call 'a fine swap'—and I hope to deserve it, seh!"

Again he made one of his bewildering shifts from dignity to playful seriousness when he said:

"I too have felt from the start that we belonged; and, since it will be my duty to be with you more or less in a certain important undertaking, it is plain that the paths of duty and pleasure coincide. Therefore—" he stopped on the sidewalk and struck an oratorical attitude before me—"I challenge you to refute the proposition that we are jus' natchally boun' to get mo' aw less intoxicated in honor of the occasion, right at the kick-off! And I respectfully submit that, since Time is doing his Marathon as usual, there is some fresh mint' round at Mrs. Cary's! Then there's the Man from Denver. By George! There he is!"

He broke off at the sight of a rusty cab with a red-whiskered driver in a silk hat. The combination was striking. Castleman signaled the man to stop.

"Who? D'you mean that is the Man from Denver?" I asked.

"Lord! No! But I refuse to walk on such a glorious occasion, and what more could royalty ask than a silk dicer and red whiskers? Oblige me by a glance at the expanse of ears, too. Man—the very stars in their courses fight for us!"

"But it's only about three blocks!" I protested as the man hove to with a loud command to his bony steed.

"Just what Pegasus here is geared up for," Castleman responded promptly.

He turned to the frowning Jehu with eager earnestness—

"I will give you a dollar to take us to Gramercy Park by way of Madison Square."

"Dollar'n' a half!" said Whiskers with decision, chewing so his whiskers fanned rapidly.

"You're elected. Will you please drive slow, by quiet streets? We want to talk secrets, and let me warn you not to strain those nice ears!"

This with a smile that robbed the speech even of impertinence.

"In wid ye, and t'ell wid yer secrets! Anny omadhon wud know, be the looks av ye, they'd not be wort' the listenin'. It's siftin' slathers of gab fr'm th' likes av ye, fer the sinse that's not in 'em, that made me ears grow that big!"

"One to you, my Tipperary cousin!" Castleman made his bow to the whiskers as he held open the door for me. "After you, Doctor!"

BUT once in the cab and rolling over smooth asphalt, the change in the vivid Kentuckian was quick and unsettling. He became keen and steel-cold in an instant, while his face settled in lines that told of suffering beyond his years, with the resulting understanding of human nature. He made sure our driver could not hear us before asking me:

"Doctor, do you know where Dan Wheeler is? Could you find him this evening?"

"Yes, I hope so, anyhow. I was going to look him up tonight or in the morning, to find out about the Pen position."

"Now don't think that explains everything!" He startled me again by his insight. "It is not cheap curiosity. I know you are used to being pumped about the famous man-killer and gambler. He's a mighty fascinating and mysterious person. For a long time I have wanted to meet him; but I have reasons and you'll know them some day—soon."

" 'S all right! I'm not asking for charts and diagrams. It's plain enough there's doings ahead, and there's mystery in the very air; but tonight I am 'yours truly' for anything at all. If Wheeler's in New York I know where to get news of him, but I can't promise you a warm welcome on my introduction. He didn't want me to take those exam's—had other plans for me—and I'm not sure he'll clasp me to his bosom."

"If I am well informed," said Castleman,

Digitized by Google

"he's no fair-weather friend. And if he had plans, I'll go bail they were worth listening to."

"That is mighty correct!" said I. "What's more, he has influence to put a thing through. I only hope he's still willing to help!"

"That brings us back—" Castleman's face brightened again—"to the 'last remark but one.' As I was saying, it's part of my job to look you up, and it's right pleasant that we find we fit so well together. Now as to appropriate festivities—how do you stand on the question of intoxicatin' beverages?"

"I am out of training—not up to Kentucky standards," I modestly announced. "I used to lap up quite some moisture, but don't expect me to break any records offhand."

"Perhaps it would be better for you to take a cigar every third round," he gravely considered. "It's part of my program to take out a couple of 'hobos' tonight and get them properly drunk. It can't be done on a dry throat, and I must hold up my end. People may tell you I live only for excitement and risks, but even my enemies never claim I am a beastly drunk. Just the same, when I am slightly stimulated——"

His expressive eyebrow drew up and he shook his head anxiously.

"You mean you'll bear watching when you're lit up?"

"My best friends, even, admit that when I unbuckle in my cups my movements are some hard to anticipate; while others describe me as a crazy Indian on the warpath. The truth is somewheah between. But please remember I am not goin' it blind, even when my eyes don't track, and gove'n yo'self acco'dingly, seh!"

His occasional lapses into dignified South talk, as well as his changes from frank boyishness to keen purposeful determination, had their effect upon me. Whether he meant to do it or not, he was getting me much worked up over his "job" which was evidently no light matter. I knew it would be useless to question him outright.

"Now about these hobos?" I reminded him—a hobo, a post-graduate medical student, usually a country doctor brushing up.

"Yes, seh!" He gave another look out to see if the driver was listening. "The man we are afteh this evenin' is the one Mac referred to as 'The Man from Denver.' Dr. White—Bob or 'Buster' White in the cow country—has been cowboy, gun-fighter, Klondiker, and has made his big pile on the Yukon. So he is in New York carryin' out his boyhood's dreams: studyin' medicine, collectin' rare jewels and lookin' for Adventure with a big A."

"If he's the man who came to 'Charity' to see Brewer operate, the day before I left for Washington, he doesn't look safe to play with," I put in.

"That is the man, seh," the Kentuckian went on serenely. "And he has his Fidus Achates and Boswell in the person of a Dr. Nixon of Texas who trails around with him. Accordin' to Nixon they find New York mighty tame fo' red-blooded men and they are sighin' for man-size doin's."

"So you want to show 'em Sled Wheeler?" I guessed.

"That may not be necessary, seh! I am not livin' to satisfy their ambitions but to do my own work, and I want to see Dan Wheeler. But it is also a part of this evenin's task to get under the skin of Dr. White—to see his wheels go 'round if possible. Here we are! Please remember, if Mrs. Cary asks you, that you are only taking me out to show me Main Street by night!"

Afterwards I recalled that Castleman keenly watched the driver with the whiskers as he paid him, also took his number, but I was soon submerged in the warm wave of welcome from the pretty and motherly Mrs. Cary and her boarders—all Virginia girls, and most of them studying art or illustrating. It was like getting home again, as you know if you have lived with Southerners.

AFTER a genuine Albemarle dinner, Mrs. Cary went to her rich-toned K & B Grand and made music, real music, while the sad and lovely face of Lily Gwathmey with the sidelight on it seemed to foretell—but her tragedy has no place here. What I am getting at is that there was an evident conspiracy among the girls and Mrs. Cary to keep us from going out that evening. But the Kentuckian managed his excuses with his own tactful gallantry and went to his rooms for his hat while Mrs. Cary drew me into the little reception-room.

"Doctor Cohbin, I want to ask you to

Digitized by Google

take care of Blain Castleman. The po' boy is so fearless—just naturally reckless! And he seems all afire inside—just bound to get himself into trouble, fo' excitement! I know he'll get himself killed yet, and he's *such* a dear boy—just like his mother. I'd give anything to see him married to some nice gyerl. I *know* he's been disappointed in love—that's why I'm askin' you to look afteh him!"

"I'll certainly do the best I know. But he's no weakling."

"Mm-mm! I—should say—not! D'you know, sometimes I think he's man-huntin' —the otheh man, y'know. Such a cold, cruel look will settle in his face." She drew a long breath with a sigh. "Well, heah he comes. Be good to him!"

Of course I promised. In fact I was being good to myself in urging Castleman to stay in and pass a quiet evening. I was not curious to see wheels go 'round in the Man from Denver. I had heard of him, too. Both in the Klondike and in the cow country he had a record, and I did not consider punching him up a safe amusement. I told the handsome Kentuckian something to this effect.

We were in the dim entrance-hall, and I could just see his slow smile as he said:

"Just what makes him interestin', Doctor! But nobody's goin' to get shot this evenin'."

"Bet you you've got a gun on you, right now."

He drew the gleaming thing from his hip and handed it to me.

"It's not loaded, see? And you may carry this if you like."

He offered me the clip of ten loaded shells which he took from his coat pocket.

"N-no—" I handed both back after a moment—"if anybody's to get it, it must be the other fellow. But, you know, you'll be pinched if it's found on you."

"We take chances every time we cross the street," he answered cheerfully, as he put gun and shells in different pockets.

On our way to the Second Avenue boarding-house most used by hobos, he told me:

"I take some of my meals here, just to see folks. They come from all over and make interesting reading. This Dr. White came right to me, came to board here, so I didn't have to go after him when I got orders to look him up. Now we may have to do some braggin' about your famous friend Wheeler, just for bait, to get White interested. He's a wise bird, this Klondiker and ex-cowboy, not to be caught with chaff. But of course he has heard of Sled Wheeler, and like anybody else he's keen to see and meet the mysterious king of gamblers and man-hunters. Who wouldn't be? What does he look like—this Wheeler? Is he—he can't be a dull brute—just a butcher?"

"Dull? Lord! Talk about lightning and dynamite! Who was it said you forget all about his record when you meet a great man? Dan looks the part, and then a whole lot. Besides, he's tuned up inside to concert pitch all the time. He makes the air crackle and draws all the spotlight, and when he looks at you—why, I've seen him turn a dangerous yegg into a whimpering pup without laying a hand on him! You've got to see and *feel* him. Brute—I don't think! Dressed and groomed to the minute, he moves like a tiger or Dan Daly. You don't see anybody else on the stage. He—oh, well, anybody can get me going and have all the fun he wants by starting me off on Dan Wheeler!"

I pulled up and regarded him with suspicion.

"Man, this is no trifling matter, as you'll see before we're through," Castleman protested. "And your word-picture fits with a story my father used to tell. He met the famous gambler at the races. Wheeler had a three-year-old entered and she won, but the favorite was kicked before the barrier dropped, and the owner of the favorite was usin' language out of a bottle. Wheeler comes up and offers to run the race over as soon as the colts were fresh and call all bets off. Wheeler bein' a big winner, the beaten man is set back on beam ends. He sputters:

" 'But, you—why —— —— it, they said you were a —— gambler and——'

" 'Forget it!' Wheeler cuts in, turnin' away, cool's a julep. 'We're a pair o' simps. They told *me* this was a gentleman's race!' My father used to say he found the gambler 'a most interestin' and well-informed person, seh!' "

"I'd hardly say 'interesting' was drawing it too fine," said I, "but you'll see—if you do see him. I hope he is in town, for he's my only hope of a job."

"Look hyeh!" Castleman stopped me short on the sidewalk to emphasize his words. "Don't think me patronizing, or

Digitized by Google

unduly mysterious, but I can assure you you will be fixed all right inside forty-eight hours. I cert'nly would be better pleased if you could use your room at Mrs. Cary's and keep me from bein' homesick; but I happen to know you're wanted—for a job that will pay you better than a dozen army positions. So cheer up! The worst is yet to come!"

Before I could express any thanks or curiosity he went on:

"Hyeh we are! This is the place. Now let me warn you once more that this is no child's play—not even a fool drinking-bout we are goin' on. A whole lot may depend on this evenin's performance, so just act like you were makin' history! Now—we're off!"

NO WARNING was needed to put me on my mettle, for there was something in the air. Moreover, the Man from Denver was no common person. His satellite called Nixon, from Texas, was an insignificant, chunky person with a dark face that worked too easily; but the Klondike millionaire and ex-cowboy had the marks of a man.

As I got his firm grip and met his keen, deep-set eyes I got an impression of large steadiness. This Bob White reminded me of Jim Searing, the big breezy athlete and gun-fighter whom Wheeler had broken with his smooth white hands. Only, Searing's big canine teeth made of his smile a menacing snarl, while White's even ivories gave his rare grin a surprising attraction. He did not enthuse at Castleman's proposal that we go slumming, but the Texan was excited by the mention of Wheeler's name.

We had met them in the hall, just as they came out from dinner, and Nixon was chewing a toothpick with ostentatious relish. When the Kentuckian casually announced that I might be able to point out the king of swell crookdom, Nixon spat out his toothpick and slapped the big man on the back.

"Bob, yo' hyeah that? We may get a peep at the great Sled Wheeler himself and we see crooks a-plenty! Go get yo' Colt!"

"I ain't lookin' for trouble—" the lean brown face of the plainsman was grave and he regarded Castleman steadily— "and one way to get it is to get ready for it."

"Still, it's better to be safe than sorry," Castleman said easily.

There was a moment of eye-to-eye silence before the big fellow turned on his heel and went up-stairs. Nixon followed him, turning on the stairs to give us a significant wink and headshake that meant, "Can you beat him?"

"Castleman," said I, "that man is no four-flusher, or I'm a Hottentot. He looks like a man it isn't safe to annoy beyond a certain point."

"That's the game—to find the certain point," was his prompt answer. "I cert'nly hope he is no four-flusher."

There was no use guessing, and I gave it up, kept my peace and followed his lead.

That evening was so mixed that it is hard to recall clearly, but it was far from dull or slow. It brings to mind a saying of the Kentuckian's:

"Plans are trashy things, anyhow. Figure 'em out as fine as you please an' some real rough *man* will jump in and mess 'em all up. I go more on folks than figures. You get together a few men, real men, and things will sure happen."

WE PAIRED off, Castleman with the Texan, I and the Man from Denver, as we started out on our sightseeing. We began with the lower end of the Bowery and followed the leading of Chance. The Kentuckian was ready to explain anything—the less he knew about it the readier he was to explain—and everywhere he had a delighted audience of bystanders. His pale Grecian face became paler and more handsome, his speech more flowing and brilliant, his manner more courteously charming, as he stowed away more Bowery whisky.

He considered it a grave breach of good manners to pass a saloon without paying his respects and his cash to "the man inside," and firmly refused to slight one of them. This meant fast drinking. The Texan and I soon had to withdraw from the contest, but White quietly kept up his end, simply making sure that Castleman didn't pour short drinks or empty them somewhere outside his person.

I soon lost my uneasiness, in listening to the Kentuckian's rich and effortless humor, and felt sure that my sole task would be to load him into a cab inside an hour. I didn't know the Castleman strain. The only

Digitized by Google

effect of many potations seemed to be a general enlargement of his faculties, making him more striking and compelling than ever. If I had not been, like all within hearing, under the spell of his magnetism I should not have fallen in with the scheme he proposed to me in a whispered aside:

"Our guests have complained twice that they have not had their pockets picked. Can't it be managed? Try hard!"

We were entering another corner saloon, and he was politely holding open the doors for us to enter. Even as he spoke I was noting that on the opposite corner was the saloon and ward headquarters of one Connie Burns, where I was planning to inquire if Dan Wheeler was in town and where he could be found. I could think of no plausible excuse to get word with "Con" alone, so I took the simple way of telling the exact truth in the hope it would not be believed.

As we lined up at the bar and the Kentuckian suavely greeted the bartender—introducing to us the man of drinks as a lifelong friend, I asked them to excuse me while I ran across the street to fix up something for their amusement. I noticed a shade of deeper suspicion in the eyes of the Man from Denver, and I didn't blame him for that.

I found the ward leader behind his own bar, helping out with the evening rush, and winked him to the rear.

"Mr. Burns, you remember me—Corbin, Doctor from the Pen—and the night we got the girl out of the house uptown, you and Wheeler and I?"

"Sure! How are you, Doc? What can I do for you?"

He reached me the politician's ready hand, with the cold, keen look that was always his own.

"Tell me first, is Dan in town?" I dropped to a whisper.

"Sure."

"Do you know where he is, right now?"

"Yeh. Here, in the back room. But he won't be there long."

"Would he want to see anybody here?"

Burns shook his head, wiping off the bar as he murmured without moving his thin lips:

"Not while he's running the swell gambling-joint on West Forty-blank St. But I'll ask him—if it's special. He might see you."

"Not so bad as that. But look! Have you got a first-chop 'wire' handy—a real classy leather-lifter. I got a pair of lollops in tow, in Sweeny's over there now, and I want one of 'em frisked right—not for keeps, but as a show. If it can be done I want the watch and roll taken from one and put in the pocket of the other—the one with the dark hair—before they get out of Sweeny's. Is there a——"

"There's 'Denny the Dip' right now!" Con interrupted, and raised an eyebrow toward a slim well-dressed youth who entered as he spoke. "Denny's going out on the hick circuit with Graham's swell mob this week. He can take the filling out of your teeth and never touch you."

The proprietor was about to call the slim youth and introduce us, but at that instant I caught sight of my party entering the street door. I turned my back to exclaim hurriedly:

"The devil! There they are now! See if you can't frame it up with 'the Dip' in back there; tell him to watch out for the big fellow, for he's wise and he's a killer!"

I turned before he could protest and went to meet my friends and to cover his retreat with Denny into the back room. I did not relish the scheme. It seemed to me pointless and silly, but I recalled Castleman's charge earlier in the evening and hoped it would go off without mishap.

White was openly suspicious now. His eyes, wide-apart and long-slit, had in them the implacable glare you see in the eye of the Indian or the large beast-of-prey, as he watched Castleman and me from under heavy brows. Even his large features seemed to sharpen and stand out, and a swarthy flush had appeared in his lean cheeks. He stood up to the bar in an ominous silence—did not even name his drink—and looked at us. Nixon was watching him, alarmed and half drunk.

As I took in the strained situation more thoroughly I decided to stop the game if possible. But before I could make a move to summon Burns from his back room, White spoke in his deep strong voice. Holding his filled glass level with his face he stopped Castleman's usual toast with a growl.

"One minute, Mr. Castleman." He took his time, spoke with slow distinct irony that was addressed to me as well as the cool Kentuckian. "I want to know before we go any further just what you want to do.

Digitized by Google

Is it on your program to get us just plain drunk—or to give us knockout-drops and go through our clothes?"

I was thoroughly ashamed of myself and must have looked it; but the handsome head of the Kentuckian was as high and his blue eyes as steel-cold as ever. He answered in a low, smooth tone, hardly above a whisper:

"May I ask, seh, the reason fo' this insult? Have we given yo' any cause——"

"Never mind the reason!" White interrupted heavily. "It's good enough. Did you two start out to fill us up with booze and see us perform, or not?"

At that tense instant an unsteady individual lurched into the Denver man from behind, driving White against me and spilling his liquor on my vest. My hat, too, was knocked over my eyes, and when I got out from under it Denny the Dip was wiping me off with profuse apologies and a napkin, while the staggering drunk was being shoved into the street.

Denny suddenly stopped his excuses and, with a hurried word about looking after his friend, was gliding to the door, when White called out:

"Hold on! Lock the door—I've been robbed! Hey, you! Stop where you are, or get shot!"

HOLDING the Dip covered with his big blued Colt, steady as a rock, the man was worth seeing. By sheer force of will he seemed to draw the hypnotized "wire" back into the barroom. Castleman, meanwhile, stood looking on with cool half-smiling curiosity—quite detached. Without moving his gun, White turned his aggressive eyes on the Kentuckian.

"So this is your game! This is the hospitality of the South, is it? And you—" he turned his attention to me—"you belong to the same gang of crooks. You want some fun with us Hoosiers, and you get it! But first—dig up my watch and money, and do it quick!"

"I haven't got your goods," I snapped. "This was only a——"

Open-mouthed, I slowly dragged from my vest-pocket his watch. Unconsciously my hand had gone to that pocket at his accusation, and now I found on the other side a strange roll of bank-notes. I held them before me and stared at them.

"I like a liar, but I do hate a fool!"

Seizing and pocketing his property, White withered me with a curl of his thin lips as he went on:

"So this was your entertainment—a cheap hold-up, and a fizzle at that! You come out West once—we'll show you!"

"Dr. White," Castleman interposed, laying a light hand on White's sleeve, "you are making a mistake. I got up this thing. Dr. Corbin arranged the details under protest, at my request. I was the one to propose the expedition and this last little joke—a poor one I admit—but you complained that you hadn't had your pocket picked——"

"Hands off until you're better acquainted!"

White shook his arm free, and for the first time seemed really angry. It was the real thing, too, the cold fatal killing-lust that gleamed in his eye as he grated out his slow words:

"I said I liked a liar—a long way off—*at shooting-distance!* And, Mister Castleman—I believe you—are a—liar!"

"That is enough, seh!" Castleman drew himself up, drawing a long breath as if of relief, and his tone was quietly comfortable as he concluded: "Such talk means just one thing. I am at your service any time."

"No time like now!" White stepped back three lithe steps. "Draw your gun!"

Erectly balanced, with upthrown revolver at shoulder and facing the Kentuckian squarely, he waited for Castleman to draw. They were too fine a pair for gun-food. I could not help admiring the man—could not feel angry after the first moment.

"That will be all!" I stepped between them. "White—you called me a liar first, and I claim first chance to take it up. I don't use a gun, but——"

"Stand back or get drilled!" White meant it. "I got no time to listen to any——"

"You'll take time to listen to me!" I began to get hot. "I can stop as much lead as the next man. Shoot, if you can't help it—but you're going to hear the plain facts from Denny the Dip here! You can shoot, now and be sorry, or you can hear what is what, from this man. After that you will take back what you said to me, or one of us will get licked! How's that?"

Holding the Dip by the arm, for he showed signs of decamping, I stuck out my

Digitized by Google

jaw at the gunman, somewhat surprised that I was not scared by his Colt, and that he did not shoot, for he seemed to hesitate.

"Man!" I called impatiently. "Have some sense!"

And at last the thin lips relaxed, quivered an instant, then the whole face of the dangerous Westerner broke into an unwilling smile.

"I never cut loose on an unarmed man yet, and I must say you have nerve!"

He became severe again and turned to Denny with—

"Shoot it!"

Denny jumped as if shot himself.

"The—the drinks are on me, gents!" he began rapidly, eyes on the blue gun. "Con tells me two ginks wants to see some classy work, and it's me to lift the leather from one and pass it into the other's kick, so neither one gets hep. I gets Bricks Mullaney for a stall, and we frames it he's to fake a souse and start something, and I frisk the guy in the mix-up.

"It goes through all right, but I stows the kale on the wrong party. All I knows is what Con tells me, 'The dark one and the light one!' And I picks dese two big guys fer the boobs!" He indicated White and me by a furtive gesture, adding: "My mistake, gents! But I'm game fer de drinks all 'round—well?"

"That's right, gentlemen!" Burns himself, who had been surprisingly oblivious to an imminent shooting-scrape, now came forward to speak with authority. "I can answer for the Doc, here—he's dead square! He tells me it's only a phony job he wants done at the start. What's more, he don't get any the worst of it in my place—and that goes!"

"It looks like I'm the goat, all right, gentlemen." White pocketed his weapon with a smooth practised movement and held out his hand to me. "I take it all back—will you shake?" He turned from me to Castleman. "Same to you, Mr. Castleman, let's start all over."

"With pleasure, after I have apologized for a silly attempt at a joke." Castleman raised his glass gracefully to White. "It might have resulted in the shooting of a brave man, more likely of a foolish one."

He indicated himself by a gesture.

Glasses clinked and turned upward, came to rest on the bar, then the Kentuckian gravely asked—

"I'd like to know if any one, by chance, has told you I was—quarrelsome."

"Sure, I heard about your duels!" White flushed guiltily. "Probably I was more bull-headed because you were said to be sure death."

"Just the sort of bull-headedness we're looking for," Castleman said meaningly. "Here's hoping we'll see more of each other—much more!"

"D'you mean it?" White asked quickly.

"I cert'nly do."

They looked eye to eye, and the big man flushed with pleasure as he said:

"I've been some lonesome myself, but you seemed to me to travel with a better bunch—I felt like a Maverick, and that was another reason. I want to say you two fellows look all right to me, now. When you've lost your last cent and your last friend, call on Buster White!"

It was said with a simple force that lent the words dignity, made the man look larger than ever as he turned from the bar saying:

"Now I've got to quit—just when we have got next to one another. I've had all I can carry. If I take more I shall be a bad Indian and wind up in the cooler. Me for the hay!"

"Can't be done!" said Castleman promptly. "Not in New York. There's a law against letting a good man go to bed before midnight, and I have more confessions to make—outside. Good night, Mr. Burns!"

After shaking hands all around with the proprietor we made our way through the crowd of loafers that had gathered to see the trouble. But once in the street outside it developed that Nixon, owl-eyed through all the disturbance, was suddenly overcome by his feelings.

"WHOSSAYS m'frien' White's intossicated?"

Fixing me with his baleful glare he tilted forward, all but falling on my bosom, tilted as gently back and announced:

"I c'lick th' sonfagun 't says he's tossicated. Lemme at'im!"

He made a sudden swing at a stranger who came out through the swinging half-doors. Missing by the five or six feet that separated him from his mark, he pivoted on one heel and sat himself down heavily on the sidewalk. There he braced back on outspread hands, hat tilted on nose so that he was in darkness; and showed signs of grief.

Digitized by Google

"Poor ol' Nixon!" he sobbed. "Dr— hic! Drunk again! Drunker'n ever!"

And solemnly he wagged his extinguished head. Next, he lifted up his voice in a demand for lights, also he wished to go to bed. In this last matter we had to satisfy him, so a cab was summoned. It arrived at the same time with an officer who had been called by some officious bystander in the period of stress. It proved to be an old friend of mine, who offered to take the indisposed member off our hands and see him home; but White insisted on seeing Nixon safely tucked in, and we did what we could to help.

"Now I guess the wise game for me is to follow suit," White persisted after we had arrived at his hotel and left the Texan snoring. "It looks like I had made enough show of myself for one evening."

"The night is in its infancy, yet," observed Castleman, regarding the big Westerner pleasantly. "Dr. Corbin is going to show us some mighty wicked men—perhaps the king of man tamers, the great Sled Wheeler himself. You had forgotten that, I ween."

"Is that on the level, Doc?" White faced me with intent eagerness—"do you really know Dan Wheeler, or was that only a part of the joke?"

"Dan Wheeler was my right bower and prime minister in the management of the Pen Hospital. All last Winter he helped me clean up the service and clean out the grafters—the best friend a man ever had. I hope he will help me get my job back. But I took the Government exam against his advice, and I feel a bit scary about going to him for more favors. He's not the kind to turn the other cheek, you know!"

"I should guess *not!*" White was staring at me wonderingly. "And he—a big crook—can get you a position? Ain't this city the limit! But I'd rather see Dan Wheeler than any man in New York, right now, unless it's this Clark Sibley you see in the papers so often. Sure you know where to find him?"

"Then you will go with us?" said Castleman getting up—we were talking in White's room—and put on his hat, looking delighted. "Come ahead—we three are fated to do things together! This is only the beginning!" He led the way whistling low and most musically.

"What about the man you mentioned—Clark Sibley?" I asked the Denver man as we came down the steps. "He's not filled any graveyards, to my knowledge."

"Not for publication," said White, with a slight smile. "In the newspapers he's a social swell, reform politician, athlete and boxer—everything nice and lovely! Just the sort to drive the ladies crazy. But I happen to know he's carrying a side line of devilment under his nice pink hide. He does things beside saying his prayers—you hear me! But those things don't get into print because he has a big pull with 'The Machine!' "

Surprised at so long a speech from the big fellow, I only now noticed that Castleman had stopped whistling to listen, and that his face had taken on the frozen look that made it marble-like. As we came abreast I asked him:

"Have you met him, Castleman? I hear you have penetrated social circles here."

The Southerner turned on me his startled icy-blue eyes as he answered with dignity:

"I have not met Clark Sibley, seh. Not yet!"

"From the way you say it—" White spoke with eyes on the Kentuckian's—"I'd not care to be Mr. Sibley when you do meet. Got anything against him?"

"No, seh, nothing—that is—but what I have read in the papers. I am a bit old-fashioned in some things—about women, for instance."

Even White did not care to follow up his questioning on that line, but he turned to me with—

"I suppose a man can do anything at all in New York, if he has a good pull and a lot of money."

"Unless he does it to a man who has more," said I. "That's an eppygram. To quote the great Mulvaney once more, 'I made ut!' And this place should be the swell gambling-house we're looking for. It's the right number, but I don't see any one going in, and the windows are all dark."

BUT even as I spoke a big closed car slid up behind us to the curb. A young man got out, sent the car away and ran up the steps of the apparently closed house. His soft tapping caused a light to flash on his face through the plate-glass door, and he disappeared inside.

"Looks easy," said White. "Go to it,

Digitized by Google

Doc! See if your face is good for the bunch of us."

I went through the same motions I had seen made by the stranger. The light flashed and a voice asked—

"Any friends inside—I don't know you?"

"I am a friend of Dan Wheeler's!" I ventured.

"You're lucky!" The door opened. "Both these men with you?"

"Yes."

"Up two flights—to the left!"

As the street-door closed, the hall and stairs were lighted automatically.

The doorkeeper was a slim youth with a cynical hatchet-face. He had already resumed his easy chair and evening paper in the upper hall, as we started up-stairs.

"How's he know you're not lying?" muttered White.

"I don't!" came from him of the hatchet-face without lowering of the newspaper he was reading. "But if he is—just pity him, that's all!"

White turned at the top of the stairs to look down at the speaker and emitted a grunt as he climbed on up the next flight.

"Hm! This is getting too thick—too much stage-effect about this. I'm beginning to think this man Wheeler's a fake, if there *is* any sich animile!"

The door at the second stair-head let us into a large room that took up all the second floor of the house. It was nothing but a billiard-room, dim with smoke and filled with the click of balls and the low talk of the players. On the raised seats that rimmed the room were many spectators, and just as we entered a few of them got up to leave—one voicing the disgust of all.

"I had enough! It's nothing but a fake. Billiards!"

A man playing at the nearest table looked up at the outgoing youngsters, turned to wink at me, and I recognized my old friend Redney Start who used to roll roulette at "No. 17."

"Hello, Doc! How're they coming for you!"

He came forward and was introduced. At my first question he told us:

"Sure! You nailed the right number this hitch. Tonight is one of Dan's nights up-stairs, and that's why we don't pass any kids like the bunch of college freshmen that just blew by."

"But, Redney—" I drew him aside to ask—"how is it Dan's running a place in the city right now, after selling out the White Room just a month or two back? I thought he didn't stand in with the present head of The Machine."

"Now you're asking!" Redney shrugged, slanting a glance at my companions.

When I assured him they were right he made the low-voiced confession:

"Nobody seems to get the right dope on this place. Who d'you guess they say is putting up for this layout? And it cost some guy into six figures."

"Give it up."

"Young Sibley—Clark Sibley, the sweet-smelling ——! Don't let it get past you, I'm belching because Dan's friends are all up in the air, and I hear you are one of them. But if you double-cross me—you know Dan!"

He left me to play in his turn, looked at his watch and put up his cue.

Coming back to where we stood watching, he charged me again:

"Don't forget! If you leak, it's me for the scrap-heap!"

"I'll say nothing. Why—are you working here?"

"Sure—rolling the big table. Going to kick-off right now. You and your friends sit on that last bench over there, and come up when the lad in his shirt-sleeves gives you the wink. On Dan's nights we don't let any but the live ones get by."

So we took our places on the anxious-seat near the door that gave on the staircase and in due time got our signal to go up.

In the up-stairs room, guarded by a steel door, was the usual roulette layout with its accompanying sideboards of refreshments; also a faro layout; and already there was high play at both ends of the room. At a look from Redney, who was rolling the little ball and passing out chips of big denominations, we took our places near him at the head of the roulette table. Castleman and White, both being men of money, placed some bets on the colors and the long rows of numbers, while I sounded Redney for information.

"Is Dan in the house now?" I asked him in a whisper.

Instead of answering, Redney gave a side-jerk of his head to call my attention to somebody or something going on around the lower end of the board. Most of the players were men of force, of the keen-eyed,

Digitized by Google

thin-lipped variety of sports that would take the widow's mite or the orphan's bread without compunction. But at that moment a newcomer elbowed his way to a favorable place next to the Kentuckian—a beefy, hairy-handed brute with a viciously reckless expression on his congested face—and settled down with no apology to any one and only a surly nod to Redney.

"H'are ye, Red? Gimme all blues!" He threw a large note on the table and cast about an insolent look. "Where's this Wheeler we hear so much about?"

"How are you, Brett?" Redney pushed over the stack of blue chips. "Wheeler? Ask me where lightning will strike next! But if you are anxious to see him, all you got to do is start something!"

"Yeh? So he eats 'em alive, eh? Well, I've been known to start something before now, and I've yet to see the man to stop me before I'm ready!"

The boaster tossed a pile of chips on the red with much show of carelessness as he shouted his defiance for the admiration of all.

"Who is that?" I again whispered to Redney.

"Brett—Chicago bad-man. Claims to have downed several men and he's come to our village to show us things," Red answered rapidly, as he made a show of searching in his cash-drawer. "If he can say something half-way sassy to Dan and get by, he'll brag forevermore on the strength of it. Dan must be somewhere around; it beats —— how he finds out when there's something doing and shows up just on his cue."

Redney gave the ball another twirl, starting it purring on its winning way, meanwhile darting keen glances all about the room and through the open doors beyond. Presently he continued his murmured talk to me, with almost no lip-motion.

"There he is now—just passed the door—he's not ready to come in yet. But he's got an eye on somebody in here. Cheese it! Don't look this way. His Noblets from 'Chi' is on, and he'll think we're framing something on him; he's a nasty proposition when he's half-shot, and he's got two gauges now!"

Here the ball stopped, and Redney called the number and color, adding as he pushed a pile of chips to Castleman:

"Here you are, son. You sure got your rabbit's foot with you tonight!"

"No you *don't!* Half those blues were mine!" The mean-eyed rough from Chicago covered the chips with his big hand and struck out a truculent jaw. "If you're running a robber's joint here you'll have to frame up something flossier than that to get me! Here's where you give up or get yours—you red-headed ——! I'll give you just two——"

"DON'T do it, neighbor! He is red-headed—don't give him one little thing!"

The low, slightly hoarse voice had power to silence the big man and to draw every eye around the board to the speaker. The graceful figure at the bully's elbow was hardly above medium height, but dominated the company by its intense virile force. The pale face wore a half-smile more dangerous than any frown, while from the long green eyes came a gleam of steady power that sent a noticeable thrill around the watching circle.

"Who is it? Is that Wheeler?" whispered a few of the duller wits.

But the more alert majority held a tense silence. For the famous cracksman-gambler, moving a step nearer to the Chicago man whom he seemed to hold under the spell of his benumbing gaze, spoke again.

"What's this crook doing to you—tell *me* your troubles!"

"He's holding out on me when I win!" the big man shouted loudly. "He pays my chips to this young ——!" He jerked his thumb at Castleman. "And I saw him framing it up with him and that other ——! I got wise to the grift before he put it over, and by —— I'll——"

"How much do you win?"

Again the low, slightly hoarse tones stopped the roar of the blusterer.

"I had two hundred on the red!" The big man lowered his voice, then steamed up as he went on. "It ain't the amount. I don't stand for——"

"Pay him two hundred, and cash his pile!" Wheeler ordered Redney, who had the money already counted and waiting, and now shoved it over at the word, so that the razor-edged voice hardly paused an instant. "There's your money—put it away!"

The famous man-handler moved close to the big bully who was turning crimson as he pocketed his cash. Before the Chicago

Digitized by Google

man could get his thoughts to work Wheeler, lowering his voice so the crowd held its breath to hear the low sharp words, continued evenly:

"Now, stranger, I don't like your face. It makes a noise, and we keep this place quiet. You'll find your hat in the hall!"

"I——"

The bully, purple with rage, had only opened his mouth to roar, when his face twisted in a grimace of pain. For his right arm was caught in a grip that threatened to amputate it above the elbow, and forced upward across his grimacing face. Thus, green eyes boring into his at a few inches distance, he was turned around and forced swiftly to the door.

I can see that mottled face now, twisted over his shoulder, mouthing and gasping with never a noise; and the stunned fear and astonishment it expressed would have been comic if they had not been so intense. For the full-blooded male animal was unmanned, strangely powerless. Before he reached the door he was fairly whimpering as he made futile efforts to strike at the face with the green eyes that had turned his blood to water and taken the strength from his huge limbs.

Thrust through the door, he disappeared —a clattering crash on the stairs. Wheeler closed the door and came back wiping his hands on his handkerchief—the smooth white hands that had always fascinated me.

"Well, my folks!" exclaimed White at my side, staring at the great gambler and talking to himself in utter absorption. "That's what I've read about but never thought I'd see! The eye on the man would knock out a mule!"

Wheeler was moving straight toward us through the knot of men who made way before him, and he looked at nobody but the Kentuckian. Holding out his hand he said gravely:

"Mr. Castleman, of Louisville? I knew your father, and I'm glad to know his son. Sorry to let you in for this sort of thing. It doesn't happen here often, but somebody left the bars down tonight."

"Mighty glad to know you, Mr. Wheeler!" Castleman flushed red. "I have wanted to, ever since I heard my father talk about you; and I'd have known you anywhere, seh."

It was in answer to the openly admiring gaze that went with the Southerner's boyishly dignified speech, that Wheeler said with the slight upward quirk of his thin, cruel lips at the corners:

"Don't jolly an old fellow, son! This way, one moment, please!"

Before I realized what he meant, he and Castleman had disappeared into one of the adjoining rooms.

In the general rustle and resumption of proceedings that always followed the removal of Dan Wheeler's compelling presence, White turned on me the wide gaze of a man coming out of a trance.

"Whee-e-e-eu!" he whistled long and low. "Doc, let's take a drink—one of those highball things! Well?"

"I thought you had all you could stand," I protested.

"That was before I saw this man Wheeler," he said soberly, as he moved to the sideboard and signaled a colored waiter. "Men like that don't occur but once or twice—and all bets are off—yes'm! I'm glad I came to this settlement now, and I want a large drink with all the frills on it!"

"Yass s'! You sho' get it raight now an' hyah!" answered the coal-black individual to whom the last part of the speech was addressed. "Yass s'! Mist' Wheeleh he do strike 'em all dat same way—he do dat! He's one maighty free-handed gen'leman—Mist' Wheeleh. He ain' froze to his cash, no-o suh! He know how to jah-loose from his kale-bundle, hisself, an' he sho' can make de tight-wads loosen up! Look yondeh at de wheel now—chips jes' fawevahmo' spreadin' deyselves on dat boa'd, now Mist' Wheeleh done show hisself. Al-ways is dataway. Yass s'!"

And it was so. The bare sight of the famous gambler, proverbially as generous as he was dangerous and merciless to a foe, seemed to have started the flow of money over the roulette-table—to have raised the average stake fourfold, and money was lost or won with criminal recklessness. White, too, kept the same wide, ghost-seeing look in his eyes after he had had his drink, and another one.

"What you s'pose he's doing to Castleman in there?" he asked me as he wiped his lips and searched the room quickly. "That hunch of mine is growing all the time."

"What hunch?"

"Oh, something coming!"

He answered vaguely, and before I could ask for explanation Castleman appeared,

Digitized by Google

alone. Paler than ever, he spoke to us in an awed whisper.

"Gentlemen—sh-h-h! Come away with me! We cert'nly are elected—all of us—and after tonight we are bound to keep in training. So we have got to make the most of the last chance, and just naturally wind up with one of the most symmetrical wandering drunks of our young lives!"

"Didn't I tell you?"

White waved his hand to me with a satisfied nod.

"You did *not*, and if we have any more mysterious hints I warn you right now I shall run amuck! Are you going to tell me what you mean, or——"

"Sh-h-h! Not here! Too many to listen!" Castleman laid a hand on my arm. "And one thing at a time—first business before the meeting is to polish off that large round jag! Come with brother!"

The proceedings that followed are obscured by a golden haze, but we surely did wander. I recall that somewhere, after closing-time, we were in a gorgeously fitted-up barroom. I was behind the bar, drawing beer and mixing extemporaneous drinks for many extemporaneous friends; while Castleman kept the proprietor so entertained at one of his own tables that he lost interest even in his cash-register, and subsequently slid gently under the festal board, his glowing face giving a correct imitation of a crimson sunset as it disappeared.

In this or some other place there was a misunderstanding that led to violence, and we had to subsidize an officer of the law in order to go free. Then Castleman and I put White to bed and walked home arm in arm, the Kentuckian the same polished gentleman who had left the Gramercy Park house some hours before.

It was while we were getting ready for bed, talking through an open door, that I remarked that Lily Gwathmey (one of Mrs. Cary's art-student "guests") was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen, except one.

"Exactly my opinion, seh. And now we are acquainted, I will show you the *one!*"

Castleman came into my room and handed me a small leather case. I saw by his steady eyes that he was not acting under any vinous relaxation, but that he was showing rare confidence in me to let me see the picture it contained. One glance, and I looked up at him to gasp:

"Man—it's the same one! Where did you meet Mary Lloyd?"

"At White Sulphur — I had just one dance, and ever since——"

He made no dramatic demonstration, but the vertical lines near his nostrils deepened and his face got the marble look that meant stress of feeling as he quietly finished:

"I learned that she was engaged, even then, to a New York man, Clark Sibley. You—was it the same with you?"

"Lord, no! She used to spend Summers up in Vermont and queened it over us oaf-kids. It's years ago, but she still seems more-than-human—made of finer stuff—and I didn't read the yellow papers. I know they lied if they tried to befoul her."

Without a word the Kentuckian held out his hand for a firm grip, took the picture with reverent care and went back to his room.

So Mrs. Cary's guess was right—it was disappointed love that had made Castleman reckless and cold, had driven him to search for strong meat and stark doings, in an effort to find something to bite through the benumbed shell to the quick beneath. When my light was out I lay looking out of the open window to the all-night club of actors across the corner of the square, where there was still light and music—some one playing a piano, and playing as if inspired, at 2 A. M!

It recalled and drove in the tragedy of Mary Lloyd's brilliant youth. She had all—beauty, a voice like an angel, wealth enough—all life could hold. For a season New York was wild over her voice and impossible loveliness. Then her engagement to the young millionaire and social magnate, Clark Sibley, had been followed by the death of her widowed mother, leaving her only one near relative—an uncle. At the same time the death of a young Dr. Graham had started hissing tongues going to blast her fair name.

She had gone abroad after the engagement with Sibley was broken. New York had read the yellow sheets that wallowed in filthy conjecture. After three months she was almost forgotten. But it was Radburn the actor—who knew all wickedness—who had told me that hers was one case where the libels were lies; while behind the wings and in dressing-rooms it was an open secret that Mary Lloyd had been "framed," ruined out-of-hand, at the behest of some one with power.

Digitized by Google

Probably those people over across where the music was sounding could tell where the girl was hiding. Here, in the next room, was the young Kentucky Cavalier who would give his life to know what they knew—and he was on some mysterious mission he could not disclose. It was enough to muddle a more sober brain than mine. The problem wouldn't even start, much less figure out, for it couldn't be stated clearly; and soon sleep came to wipe the slate clean.

III

"GOOD morning! Sleep well? And how do you feel this morning?"

Fresh as a white carnation, Castleman came into my room with a tray that bore a tinkling pitcher, beaded and smelling of mint.

"Like a drunk, the morning after," I answered huskily. "You must be porcelain-lined! Doesn't your head ache a bit?"

"Not a little bit, nor will yours after you've swallowed this."

He mixed me something delightfully cold and snappy, and I took it obediently. Also he had cracked ice for my head, and within an hour he had me eager for breakfast.

I shall never forget how he looked to my hot, aching eyes that morning: like the type of real Christian—a ministering angel made in Kentucky. And it was at the breakfast-table, when the colored waitress was out of the room, that he told me some more about his business in New York.

"This is one place where we are quite safe from spies or eavesdroppers, Corbin, and we can talk a bit in the cold, clear light of morning," he began. "Our business certainly needs a clear head. You already know it's some kind of secret sleuth-work?"

"Secret enough, all right; that's about all the idea I have gathered so far."

"And that is mighty correct, seh. It's so secret that I don't know myself much more than that, until I get further orders."

"From whom—or can't you tell that?"

"Yes, seh, I can now." He met my eyes steadily. "I was sent here by (he mentioned a high government official) who told me to get in touch with you and the great Sled Wheeler, also to *try out* Dr. White. You understand?"

"So last night was a sort of test-stunt?"

"Exactly, seh. The quickest way to get next to a man is to drink or fight with him, to the limit. That may be why I was picked for this job—because I have a reputation both ways. But it's more likely I was chosen because I'd be the last man in the world any one would suspect of being a U. S. detective, and the regular Secret Service is useless because every man in it is watched, or worse."

"Worse! You mean suspected of being bought up?" I asked; for I had seen a similar state of things in the corruption of New York's employees.

"More than suspected—some of them—and the same with private and municipal sleuths. It has to be fresh material, and I will say I think we shall make a strong combination, we three."

"Three? What about Wheeler?"

"Now you ask a question. I'd give something pretty to know whether the great Dan Wheeler is one of us, or one we are after; for he's mixed with some mighty triflin' people. But I expect to know more about it this morning. We are going to see him directly, and White ought to be here now."

Even as he looked at his watch the maid announced a gentleman to see Mahs' Blain, and showed in the big Westerner. In the morning light he looked bigger and steadier than ever.

"A great morning!" he announced. "And I'm ready for that boat-ride. I hope you can swim, both of you—I can't; and water in large quantities gets my goat. Say, what's a skiff anyway? Sounds dangerous to me. If it's one of these narrow, skittish-looking things with sails on it, you'll have to blindfold me and back me into it—tell you that, right here!"

"A skiff's a rowboat. What's this about a boat-ride?" said I.

"That all? That's bad enough! Why—didn't you know——?"

"One moment!" Castleman interrupted. "Some more coffee, please, Mary." And when the waitress had gone he continued: "I was just going to tell you, Doctor, that last night Wheeler made a most absurd appointment—to meet us off Pier Twenty-five, East River, in a skiff, at 10 A. M. How does that strike you? Is it a way he has—to make river and harbor appointments? Or is it done just for effect?"

"If it's for effect," said I, "you can bet high he gets it—the effect. Dan Wheeler isn't making any grand-stand play just for

Digitized by Google

applause; and what he does, he does for good reason. Moreover, it's safe betting there's something big doing when he pulls off any such spectacular scene as a salt-water rendezvous. You hear me!"

"No you don't!" White held up a hand in protest. "Don't try to steal my thunder! I been prophesying all along we were going to sit in a big game—told you I had a hunch from the start. If I didn't think it was something worth while I'd be in Cuba or Manila right now, instead of risking my clumsy carcass in an egg-shell. But come, let's get it over! It's about time to start."

It was plain that White was one of those who are desperately afraid of deep water. When we stepped into the skiff we rented at the Battery, he was as pale as chalk.

"That's an awful tippy-lookin' thing, Doc!" he said, as I held to a ring on the float and he stood hesitating to put a foot in the round bottom. "Sure you can stay with her and make her be good?"

"I'm just as much at home as you'd be on a bucking cow-pony. Get in—step in the middle and sit down facing me. I'll see you safe ashore again."

"Steady now—" he reached out a foot gingerly—"I bet I step plumb through the bottom of the darn thing. Whoa there! What makes 'er jiggle sideways like that—plannin' to lie down an' roll on me? Wait a minute—I ain't got— Say, that man's a wizz—that Wheeler!" He had got his seat with a tense grip on each gunwale. "Not another man on top o' the earth could get me out on all this deep wet water in a paper boat, right now, no ma'am! Watch out, Doc! There comes a ferry-boat bigger'n Madison Square Garden. She'll slop us bottom-up sure!"

"I guess not."

I grinned and waited until the last instant before swinging the light skiff bow-on to the high swell.

"Oh Moses! If I only knew how to pray!" groaned the browned cowboy. "Let me once get out of this fool thing and I swear I never——

"Whoa-oop— Ah-h! Bottom dropped clean out of my stomach then, Doc. I felt 'er go. Lemme get off an' walk!"

"Cheer up—that's nothing! Wait until we pass a Sound steamer! It's only three piers or so further up, anyway."

BUT when we reached the right pier there was nobody in sight. I asked the Kentuckian the time.

"It lacks five minutes of the hour," he answered, peering into the slips as we passed. "Suppose we row back and forth a few times, before these three piers."

"Suppose *we* do!" I repeated sourly. "I haven't noticed any plural propulsion in this craft so far. How the dickens is Dan going to meet us here?"

I swung the boat about as I spoke and we again approached the entrance to Twenty-five.

"Too many for me," returned Castleman, scanning the empty slip. "This one is perfectly empty—not even a chip floating in it as we passed just now. And he can't be— Well, my king! Will you look who comes here!"

It was his strongest word, and his eyes protruded as he stared at a small boat, still smaller than ours, coming toward us out of the slip that had been vacant but a moment ago. It looked like a folding canvas canoe, and in it were two men.

Wheeler, groomed to the minute, even to well-fitting gloves, sat in the stern. He touched his paddler on the shoulder, and, as the light shell altered her course and drew near, I noticed that the paddler was blind. Moreover, his face was broad and sensual, with wide nostrils that worked continually as if he were smelling his way. The effect was peculiarly hideous. It was a positive relief and pleasure to turn to the keen powerful features of the great gambler, cruel and merciless as they were.

"Wheeler, ahoy!" Castleman hailed.

But Wheeler only raised a hand for silence and with a touch directed his man to lay the boats alongside. Then with his usual keen directness he looked only at me.

"Change places with the 'Oyster,' Doc!" he said crisply. Then to the blind man whose gray, putty-colored face suggested a soft bivalve: "Back water! Keep inside the pier-head until we come back!"

By touch alone, the blind man made the change more neatly than I did. I took the light paddle and Wheeler directed me.

"Let her drift down a bit, Doc. Now pull into that eddy—we can talk here and see an earshot each way."

"So that's why we're out here," said I. "Just for secrecy?"

"That's one of three reasons. You can

Digitized by Google

judge whether it's big game we're after just by this fool stunt." Wheeler kept a sharp lookout as he talked rapidly. "But there's no time to waste, Doc. Is this Castleman clean strain, grit all through—and square?"

"He is, and then some!"

"I believe you. He looks like a Liz, but I'll put my money on him, on pedigree and performance—they picked the right man in Washington this time. I'll try him once anyhow. Now he's told you he is sent here—he doesn't know for what. Here it is! They are in trouble down there. There's a leak in their plans for New York's harbor defenses, and they can't find it. Understand?"

"Ye-es," I hesitated. "But what——"

"Wake up, Doc!" Wheeler barked. "You know there's a war on with Spain?"

"Yes!" I shouted hotly. "What of it?"

"Sh-h! Nothing!" Dan's thin lips quirked. "What you *don't* know is, that the great —— Empire would slip a few battleships into New York Harbor in a minute—any old excuse or none at all—if she only knew for sure just where our mines and under-water tricks are! She could pull off a big indemnity from Uncle Sam, just by threatening to smooth-off Manhattan Island to the water-line! Get the idea?"

"Yes," I whispered through dry lips. "But——"

"But nothing!" Wheeler shut me off. "Uncle Sam's Secret Service has fallen down on the job. The New York Bulls and Dicks are drawing down theirs to keep their eyes shut. So Uncle Sam's only hope is a special lot of Sherlocks—a fresh bunch that are neither shadowed nor bought and paid for. So they've got up an Ultra-Secret U. S. Secret Service—a Double-U. S. S. S. to go after this big game—and it's worked something on the plan of another bunch you know but can't name—understand?"

He spoke with slow clearness. No man could explain better when he chose.

"You mean the great Nameless Order? " I whispered. "The one that must not——"

"The same!" Dan interrupted. "Shows they're no fools—they've got the right idea! What's more, they have raised a big pot of money, and made the—what you call the 'Nameless Order' an offer that's worth while, even for them—and—that means us, Doc! We've got permission from way-up to handle the thing, and it means big money—big enough to split a few times and stay big—for you and me! Got that?"

"Where does that big money come from?" I asked. "How could Congress appro——"

"Congress!" Wheeler snorted. "Doc—this is no game of graft for pikers! The men that own Congress are putting up for this—without tipping off their hired men in Washington! The 'plutes' are scared stiff—they've got their heads together and decided they got to loosen up, or they'll be milked dry by this big game. So they have dug deep—chipped in to six ciphers with a figure before 'em. Is that plain?"

"Yes. What next? What do we do?"

"Ever hear of the 'Crimson Chamber'? No? Doc, that's the smoothest frame-up ever worked on this little island—must have netted millions, counting cash and sparks, and it's still doing business. It works like this:

"They pick a millionaire for their lollop, kidnap him and collect ransom—no shoestring, believe Dan! But here's the point! The boob never sees a human, never knows where he was taken—never has dared tell what was done to throw a scare into him—you can judge whether it's a live proposition or not by that. It's only lately that it has leaked out that the victim is shut up in a Crimson Chamber and *something* done to him until he's tickled to death to buy out and keep a close trap forever after!"

"But Uncle Sam!" I began, when Dan stopped me by a quick gesture.

"Coming to that! The Government wise men are on to the fact at last that the leak in the plans for harbor defense of New York, and the kidnapping game of the Crimson Chamber, have something to do with each other. They are hep that the copies of harbor-charts, and the coin dug out of the captains of industry, are going out of the country by the same route. That's why!"

"So these men—waiting back there, are sent to help—us?"

"You hit it!"

"How?"

"That's up to us! Any way we need 'em—for bait if necessary!" Dan answered grimly.

"But they're fine fellows!" I objected.

"So are we, Doc! But we have to jump when somebody whistles—no man too big to be useful; and somebody's got to be boss. Now to make sure they will be good. You

Digitized by Google

remember what you were told, once, and told not to repeat without orders?"

"Yes." With my heart in my throat, I held my breath.

"You got orders now! Tell them!" His thin lips were a line. "If you obey orders and stop there, there's no danger. And it's up to you to make them do the same. Tell them the plain raw facts and let them chew on 'em!"

"I'll do the best I know how," I said at length.

"That'll be good enough. Now for your end of it, Doc. You'll have to go back to the Pen for a while. It's no sweet-smelling job, but you'll win the stretch—hear me!"

"But that was just what I wanted," I protested. "It will keep me at least, while I am looking around."

He looked at me with a quirk in his lips and a fierce light in his dangerous greenish eyes, gave his head one slow side-shake and said:

"Doc, you're the limit! You durn farmer—quit thinking in nickels! Don't you know me—Dan Wheeler? Would I let you in for a piker's shoe-string? I'll get you for that, yet! But one thing you got to do right now—you will go down to Fort Wadsworth to see those army cousins of yours tomorrow, and you got to dress the part. So, after you wise up the two new members, you go to Smith Brothers and outfit yourself up to date. You have an account there."

"I wish I had." I shook my head mournfully. "I did once, but that was when I had a fat teacher's salary. I still have the dress-suit I got then."

"Time's up, Doc!" he snapped me off. "I said you had an account, see! So don't use any of this little wad for your scenery, for it's pin-money!" He slid something into my vest-pocket with a deft, light movement. "Now don't be a kid, you'll earn it. Be at the Pen for sick-line Monday, and now go back to Twenty-Five, on the jump, for I'm overdue now."

As I paddled him back to where the others waited, he added one afterthought—

"Tell 'em not to forget the number of this pier, or how I did the disappearing stunt."

We only spoke once more on the way, and that was when I recalled how Soldano, my Harvard classmate, had first told me the meager facts of the Nameless Order—in a moving cab. I wanted to ask Wheeler, whom I knew to be one of those higher up, if this was a law of the Order; but I knew better than to ask without permission anything about that mysteriously powerful brotherhood. Not another word was spoken until we reached the pier-head where the others were waiting in perplexed silence.

There, after we had changed places again, and the blind man was dipping his paddle for the first stroke, Wheeler waved a hand to us and said to Castleman:

"Doc will tell you all about it. So long, boys! Good luck!"

The current carried us down so that we lost sight of the little canvas shell behind the pier-head as the blind man paddled into the slip.

"Say, Doc!" White eagerly proposed. "Row back up so we can see where he goes—I dare you!"

"Why not?" I answered, and pulled a few strokes until we could see the whole length of the empty dock.

There was not a thing in sight!

"This is cheap magic. I don't like it!"

White looked at me with one eye closed, but the Kentuckian appeared to be thinking and presently said:

"He must have some reason for doing this vanishing act, beside making us sit up and take notice. Don't you think so, Doctor?"

"I certainly do. Dan never makes a move purely for dramatic effect—but I have got to get something off my mind and it's got to be done in this boat. Let's get it over."

"Trot out the goat!" said White cheerfully, and I had to remind him:

"This is no merry jest, remember! If you had seen what I have seen you'd listen mighty seriously and do some heavy thinking on what I am going to tell you. For it's hard to believe, but I am so sure it is true that I'd stake my life on it—every word. Just swing on to that!"

Here I had to dodge a tug with a scow in tow, but White was so absorbed that he failed to notice it. I plunged straight ahead:

"I have orders to tell you that you are admitted to what I shall call the Outer Circle of the Nameless Order, for it has neither name, ceremonies nor places of meeting, and outside its members nobody knows of its existence. So digest that before I go on!"

Their thoughtful silence was the best encouragement, so I continued:

"As members of the Outer Circle—my

Digitized by Google

name, remember—your duties are easy to remember. First, you will obey commands without question. They will come to you in such a way that you will know they are genuine and authoritative. Don't doubt it! Second, is command number one: You will not speak of, or give information about it to any one—not even to each other or to me—for a period of seven years from now. And that is all—all I know myself—and probably all you will ever know about it; except that you will do its bidding and be under its powerful protection."

White sat dazed, but Castleman soon asked—

"Would it be breaking rules to mention it to you now—to ask anything?"

"I don't know. When I was—told what I have told you, I asked some questions, but got nowhere. You see, right there is one of its wisest customs. A member of the Outer Circle can't let out anything to a new member, because he doesn't know anything to let out. I don't know how old it is, who belongs, what it's for, or anything of the many things you want to know."

"What do you think about it, unofficially—man to man?" White suddenly exploded.

I recalled that Soldano had given me his private notions on the subject and followed suit.

"It's my firm belief it goes 'way—'way back, and that it contains many big men of many kinds. Simple and childish as it sounds at first, the more you examine the principle of the thing, the more effectively infallible you will find its way of doing things."

"But suppose a fellow didn't obey orders?" was White's next query.

"I'd hate to think what would become of him. Ever hear of Jim Searing?"

"I should say—yes! He was a terror on the 'war path'—disappeared less than a year ago," White promptly responded. "Why?"

"He defied this same Order, and that's why he disappeared. I know, for I saw him disappear! I wish I could forget it, but I can't."

To recall the horrible scene, where a man's manhood was broken, always gave me a shivering sick sensation, and now I took it out in pulling on the oars.

Both my companions were following my advice and thinking the thing over, each so intent that he took no notice of the busy river-traffic we were threading. For some minutes the only sounds were the distant roar of the city, the whistles of tugs and the even *flap—flap—flap* of the choppy waves on the boat's quarter.

When the silence was broken, it was White who straightened his broad shoulders, drew a huge breath as he turned his face up to the great triumph of engineering then above us, and asked with exaggerated meekness—

"Please, mister, is that Brooklyn Bridge?"

"Suppose it is," said I, "what then?"

"If it is, and if my name is Bob White—I wouldn't swear to it—will some kind gentleman tell me what we three Mavericks are doing here, anyway?"

"Just what I want to know," Castleman subscribed positively. "I am getting tired of this blind-man's-buff. It's about time to show hands all around. I have told you all I know—that I was sent here to do something. I'd like to know what it is."

"I CAN tell you—to find the leak in the plan of New York's harbor-defenses and the Crimson Chamber!" I retorted. "Here! What the deuce you trying to do—swamp us?"

White had almost upset the boat in his start of astonishment, and his panicky effort to right the little craft had caused us to ship a good lot of water.

"Sit still! Stop jiggling!" I yelled. "Now don't move a muscle unless you want to go to the bottom! Castleman, take your hat and bail while I keep her head-on to the swell!"

After the first instant of panic, White showed his courage by obeying implicitly. He was painfully afraid of water in quantities, as he had told us, and he turned as white as his tanned skin would permit; but he held himself motionless until the Kentuckian had the water well below the seats. Then the big fellow took off his own hat and helped until I called a halt.

"That does settle it!" He wiped his brow. "Never again for Bobbie! Not without a good strong rope under my arms and a husky man at the other end! And I want to say right here that it ain't all water, either!"

He looked at me in real distress. I tried not to grin—he looked so like a big scared boy—as I asked—

Digitized by Google

"What's not all water?"

"The thing that scared me. Did you say 'Crimson Chamber,' or did I dream it?"

"I sure did. Was that what scared you?"

"It has scared better men. D'you know Senator Howell?"

"I know there is such a man, with a palace on Fifth Avenue and millions to burn," I answered. "Everybody knows that."

"Uh-huh! Well, he's been a sort of guardian ever since I was a kid—staked me on my Yukon trip, and when I'd made my pile it was Howell that advised me to tackle this job if I wanted action. But he said he'd had one whirl with this Crimson Chamber—had to dig up good and plenty to get out of it alive. And he told me to hike for the big trees if I ever crossed the trail of the blamed thing. He took me way out on the plains before he dared mention it; and I've felt it coming ever since we got into this boat. Howell said— Watch out there, Doc! Now we're goin', sure!"

So absorbed had I been in his story that I had to jump on one oar to swing abreast a huge swell from a big steamer. But the Westerner was shaken out of his usual reticence, and needed no prodding to keep on.

"Howell said half the New York plutes had been milked by this new terror, and the only two that had dared make a holler about it had both died of 'indigestion' within a week. He said it was a good way to commit suicide to mention the Crimson Chamber in New York right now. That's why I dished up so much water when you did it—comin' right spang on top of this other thing that mustn't be whispered, it was one too many for Bob!"

"I don't wonder at it, seh!" said the Kentuckian. "The whole business is mighty hard to swallow. So I reckon it's hope-to-die truth. Nobody'd make up any such thing and hope to be believed—besides, I have reason to know it's a fact, myself. What I want to hear is: What do we do next?"

"Get my feet on something good an' hard that won't slide an' teeter, by Henry!" exclaimed White regaining his spirits. "And thank the good Lord, there's that platform! That's what I been lookin' for ever since we started!"

The platform was the float of the boathouse where we had hired the skiff. The big cowboy could hardly wait to get ashore, but I had to tell him:

"You and Castleman will get orders what to do, fast enough. I have to go back to the Pen Hospital—just for a blind, perhaps—and I don't imagine we shall be much together for a while after today. We must appear to be man of leisure, post-graduate medical student and Pen Doctor respectively; and we can't hunt in a bunch without being watched—that would make us useless. Every man to his job, but I'm sorry!"

"Me too, or I will be when I get on that plank raft!" White's longing eyes never left the float. "As long's there's half a mile of green dish-water under me and only a sliver between us, I'm nothin' but a shiverin' jellyfish. There! Whoo-oosh! I got some air that time!" He vaulted to the float and filled his deep chest, a man again. "How much for this little pleasure-exertion? As I feel right now, I'd pay big money just to——"

His face went blank. With fingers in his vest he slowly closed one eye at me.

"Say, I'm the prize Hick! That pie-faced old shorthorn has skinned me to a fare-ye-well! And me lookin' right at him while he told me how he liked to 'see an *ath-el-ete*'—pawin' me over with his soft pads! I need a nurse!"

"I will tell Miss Kelley," said I as I got out. "Did he get your watch and scarf-pin?"

"Uh-huh! No, not the watch!" He went through his pockets. "He's welcome to the change, for he's on to his job. Remember how he tilted the boat while he was helpin' himself to the cash?" He grinned at Castleman. "Gave me such a scare he could 'a' peeled off my shirt and got away with it! I want to state that New York is some village, gentlemen. I'm beginning to feel at home here!"

Since he insisted that he was of no use except to spend his plenteous cash and asked me to loan him a five, I felt in my own pockets and found that Wheeler had advanced me twenty yellow-backed tens for pin-money. White took one of them to pay the keeper of the boat, then after lunch both he and the Kentuckian went with me to help me buy clothes and "gents' furnishings." Thus we finished the day in holiday mood and saw a good show in the evening, while I reveled in the warm sensation of again wearing right clothes, with the pockets comfortably lined.

Digitized by Google

It was after the theater in the same comfortable old eating-place on Twenty-seventh Street, where I had met the little Japanese gentleman, a sure-enough Count, who had welcomed me to the Nameless Order. We had got to the cheese and coffee when I saw the little Count making for our table. He spoke to the two new members, using the same simple dignified words he had addressed to me, bidding them welcome and wishing them success, and withdrew.

White watched him admiringly as long as he was in sight, then softly thumped the table for emphasis.

"Talk about manners! That little woodchuck has got me with both hands up. He's most too polite—makes you feel like you're falling over your own feet! So he's a dyed-in-the-wool Count, is he?"

"Prince, I believe is his real title!" I referred to Castleman.

"Yes. He's a heavy swell both in Tokio and Washington—takes precedence of almost all of them at functions. You say he welcomed you—" he stopped with a slow smile to apologize—"I beg your pardon, I forgot."

"Don't apologize to me, I am not one of the higher-ups. But nobody will know what you're talking about, and you will soon get so you won't even think about it when you are alone. That's the psychological cunning of the scheme; it will make you shun the subject in your thoughts, and you dread the mention of it. Let's forget it—leave the management to better hands and only do as we're told."

"Reads well," White commented. "But I'm about loaded to the muzzle now with things I mustn't talk about. Doc, if you hear an explosion on Manhattan one of these days, you'll know I have burst. When do you go to do your 'bit' on the Island?"

"Monday, I hope. And I am expecting a busy session, without Dan Wheeler to back me up. It's going to be rough going for a spell."

"That's all the fun of living, Doc. We're all looking for trouble and beefing when we get it. Here's hoping we all come out alive and well, for I feel it in my bones our work is cut out for us."

And we drank our last toast seriously, each one feeling that we were going to run no small risks, and that our danger was very real. But if we could have seen clearly a few weeks ahead, I know one of us who would have hesitated to go on, *if* I had dared back out.

IV

MY FEW Sunday visits to the cousin who had married Col. Jordan had been dull affairs, for life at an army-post is not thrilling. This one was no exception. Mrs. Jordan was a little woman with a brilliant mind—until the babies came. Then her horizon was bounded by the Colonel on one side and on the other by a sterilizer full of nursing-bottles. On this occasion I listened to a mother's epic on top-milk and cream-percentage, teeth and other things until I was biting my tongue to keep awake. Then came the bolt from the blue.

"And 'Buck' is worrying himself sick over some old papers he keeps in our bedroom. Isn't it silly of him? He waked Junior three times the other night—never came to bed at all, and paced the floor—back and forth—back and forth. He says the papers are plans of something or other horribly technical and important—he forbade my touching the lock-box. I just told him if he didn't stop fussing about them so Junior could get his proper sleep I would burn them, box and all. James, you should have seen his face when he told me that if I wanted to ruin him for good and all, to just tamper with those papers.

"I was really frightened. Of course I wouldn't touch the miserable things with tongs! But he swears that somebody has a duplicate key and makes copies. I heard him in his sleep—for Heaven's sake, don't tell him a word—heard him raving about it! He'd shout out: 'They've got the plans—they'll burn the city to the ground!' Then he'd groan: 'My fault. All my fault!' until I had to wake him to stop his noise.

"I am getting alarmed about him. Do you think it means anything serious? I wish you'd tell him he needs a rest—he could get off into the woods for the Fall as well as not. And just now it's so important that Junior should not be upset in any way. Don't you think so?"

I knew better than to try to answer, and she hummed right along on high.

"Now if he'd only go up to the old homestead for October it would do us all a world of good, and the maples will be just at their most gorgeous loveliness. Perhaps

Digitized by Google

you can do something with him, he thinks *so* much of your judgment, but he won't listen to *me!* He says I can't understand what it means to keep those papers untouched and in secret—that he can't trust any safe-deposit if he wants to—and not a servant is allowed in that room! I care for it myself, with all I have to do, just to pacify him, but at times I am really afraid it is an obsession and means something serious. What do you think, really?"

She was getting more than plump, and had to stop for breath, so I could get in a word.

"Hasn't anybody else been in that room?"

"Not a soul—except Mary Lloyd of course. Oh, James! I must tell you about Mary. Did you know she was back from Europe, and I'm just heartbroken over her. We were always more than sisters, you know, and I always stood up for her, even after the engagement was broken. You can't tell *me* that Clark Sibley is an angel, or such a sweet girl as Mary Lloyd would never have lost him. Mary has spent the night with me twice lately. This is the only place she goes, you know. It's awfully sad about her—and she is more lovely than ever, only she can't——"

"Was she in the room with the papers alone?"

I had to be mannerless and emphatic. It took something to stem the tide of speech that was in full flow.

"She can't take a step outside the door, even with— What? Was *who* in the room with the— Why, of course she was in the room—sleeps with me; and Buck goes into the north wing. But it would be silly to suppose she would think of such a thing—never heard of the old papers in her life!

"But James, I wish you'd go to see her. I believe you could help her if any one can—and it would do her good to see anybody from the dear old place. Please promise to call right away—I'll give you the address—and just *make* her get well! Will you do it?"

When I could get my breath I tried to be ironical.

"No doubt I could cure her in no time, all the big specialists here and abroad having failed on her case, my dear cousin."

"Special fiddlesticks! What she needs is somebody to make her mind! She is such a raving beauty, I do believe she turns the heads of all of 'em. Anybody but Mary would be spoiled, long ago. And now that she is practically deserted by every one, she is just as sweet and bright as ever. But anyhow, just go to see her—to please me."

"If I can get time. You see I have to treat most of the royal families——"

"James, stop it!" By the snapping black eyes I knew it was time to be serious.

"I will go, if she will just send me a card or something to show that she will see me and to admit me to her uncle's house. I can see myself marching up the steps of that feudal castle on Fifth Avenue and telling the drum-major at the door I want to see Miss Mary Lloyd! What chance would I have of getting in?" I asked sarcastically. "How many cranks and love-smit idiots try it on every day?"

"That's a promise, then. I am so glad—I know you can help her!"

She dropped the subject, and we went out to hear the band and see the flag come down. It is the one moment in the day of Post routine that contains a real thrill; and listening to music always brings my feelings on top. That accounts for my making a rash promise. As we were walking back to the commanding-officer's quarters in the Fall twilight, I mustered courage to return to the subject of Mary Lloyd.

"I've been thinking it over," I said, "and I will go to see that girl the first chance I get. Probably I'll not get beyond the door-step, but it will do no harm to try."

Thus I let myself in for several days of shivering dread, for I would rather have walked up to the mouth of a loaded cannon than make that call. And every time I remembered that I had it to do I felt the bottom drop clean out of my stomach.

MONDAY morning I hurried up the gravel walk to the central entrance to the Blackwell's Island Penitentiary. The big gray building frowned down at me, mysterious and kindly threatening. If that means anything, it is that in my months of work as Pen Physician I had passed through some broadening experiences.

Here I had mixed with the underworld at its lowest terms and got a new respect for human nature, even at its worst. Here I had met Wheeler and learned a new definition for courage and loyalty. Within those granite walls I knew I had not only a few enemies, but friends who would literally

Digitized by Google

give their lives for me without question. The loyalty of a crook, once won, can be counted on to the death and must weigh in the last accounting.

Mr. Kelley, fat and sleek in his blue and brass, gave me grave welcome.

"Good mor-rning t'ye, Doctor. I'm glad t'see ye. Yes, sorr, the Dep is in his offus. Joe!"

At the raising of a severe forefinger the striped messenger-boy jumped from his bench in the stone hall and ran to announce me to the acting head of the little despotism called a prison. Deputy Warden Murphy sent word that I might have an audience, and the grinning little trusty brought it to me with hand at salute. As he ushered me to the door he whispered—

"You come back, Doc-tor, yess?"

"I don't know—perhaps. But don't pass it on, Joe, remember!"

For the word would be all over the prison within the hour, by "prison telegraph," that I was to take charge again. And I did not want to make trouble. Joe grinned wider.

"No! I no tell, but I know you come back. *I* know!"

The grin vanished and it was with face blankly stupid that he showed me into the "Presence." Three striped clerks hammered typewriters at their desks. One, with a Websterian head, gave me a quick glance and was instantly absorbed in his work.

At the big desk Mr. Murphy turned from his papers and directed his severe look at me. He was a crisp, snappy man of middle-age, keen and driving, with a deep, resonant voice that had saw-teeth on it when he was aroused. Not one to trifle with, the Dep, and he had always stood behind me like a man. Moreover, he was a long-time friend and admirer of Wheeler.

"Well, Doc! What's the good word?" He rose and gave me a quick grip. "Been having a —— of a time since you left," he rumbled in an undertone. "The boys gave the new croaker a full course of sprouts."

"What is he like, the present incumbent?"

"Come again!"

"What sort is the new Doctor—Schwartz, is it?"

"Yeh! Going in to sick-line?"

He looked at his watch and motioned me to walk with him out into the stone corridor, toward the main prison. Meanwhile he talked low and fast.

"Schwartz is a little sawed-off, sloppy-mouthed mutt with curly whiskers. For a week the crooks played merry —— with him, and he hasn't got hep to them yet. He takes an hour for sick-line, and that means a cold dinner for the screws, so they're dead sore on him. Would you come back, Doc, if it could be fixed?"

"Yes. How could it be done?"

The Dep gave a quick shrug.

"Jas. G. is strong for the new croaker, and it'll take some doin' to put the skids under him. He's *put* here, Doc—that's the size of it. There's a trick bein' pulled off somewhere not far off, and it won't do to snoop around too keen, either. I'm givin' you that as a pointer."

"I thank you, and I'll remember it. Just to make some return for that I'll give you one: Dan Wheeler told me to be here at sick-line today if I wanted to get back my job. Now you can draw your own——"

"That won't take me a minute, Doc! Excuse me while I wise up 'Ken.' If we're goin' to have a riot, he ought to be hep."

And he stepped off briskly in search of the big Head Keeper, Kennedy. I followed more slowly through the heavy iron door that gave on the end of the main corridor of the old prison, just as the bell began to ring to call the prisoners in from their work to their mid-day meal.

As they shuffled in in single file, each gang close-packed in lock-step, with hands on the shoulders in front, and looking like a big black-and-white caterpillar, any man who wanted to see the doctor held up a hand. Old Kennedy, huge and leonine, stood at the door to review them. At a nod from him the man sidled out of line and took place at the end of the waiting line along the outer prison wall. This line was the sick-line, and at its head was the doctor, standing at his desk with his drug-orderly or apothecary at a table by his side.

It was all familiar to me, and I noticed at once that the trusty acting as drug-orderly was not the one I had left in that place, but Henry, a vicious German who had attempted to throw oil of vitriol in my face. Thanks to Wheeler it was Henry and not I who bore scars. They made his ugly face still more repulsive, and the man looked like a beaten hound. When Wheeler had to break a man he did it right.

Digitized by Google

I crossed the corridor to speak to Mr. Kennedy, but up came Dr. Schwartz, very important and professional. He bustled up with an airy familiar wave of his hand to the Dep and the Head Keeper, and held out a hand to me with:

"Dr. Corbin? Very pleased to meet you, Doctor. Held down this job yourself a while, I believe, so you know what it is. Gave *me* some trouble at first—a little—but I got 'em trained now, hey, Kennedy?"

The Doctor's broad thick lips were spread in a continual smile, so wet and redly shining that they at once called up the Dep's "sloppy-mouthed." Very pleased with himself was Dr. Schwartz, but Kennedy looked straight at me.

"Dr. Corbin, it's good to set eyes on ye—" and he gave me a bear-grip before he answered the doctor's question—"but don't make too sure, me boy! Dr. Corbin thought they was tamed, whin the lad there had the ile of vitrol all ready fer th' eyes of him! And d'ye mind poor Myers, Jawn?" He winked on the off-side to the Dep. "He was dead sure av thim the very day they broke loose and give us a rough-house at sick-line. They near kilt the poor divil right here where we're standin'. Did he iver get over it, Jawn—I dunno?"

"Search me!" The Dep shrugged, turned away from the doctor and looked at his watch. "They're late coming in today, Ned; that's a bad sign!"

"It is so; and it's sore-actin' they've been this fortnight. A bad lot we got now, worst I ever see. I must be afther kapin' an eye on thim!"

He moved toward the door frowning heavily.

"Well, so-long, Doc!" Schwartz was no longer smiling so broadly. "I got to hustle—there's fifty in line already!"

And, stethoscope hanging from neck, he went back to his place at the desk, at the head of the long line.

I saw at first glance that half the complainants in line were fakirs, malingerer, and looked to see the usual heckling of a new croaker by long tales of spurious ailments; but I was not prepared for what followed.

When a man was set aside as a fakir, to join the waiting-line against the opposite cell-walls, a low groan would pass down the long file of convicts. Then a general cough spread and swelled until the echoing corridor was a-roar with the nerve-racking sound. A fierce scowl from Kennedy would check it only for a moment, to begin harder than before. I saw at once that there was a frame-up coming, and I didn't want to get back my place by any such means.

I turned away and went in search of the Dep who was at the other side of the prison, talking to Assistant Head Keeper Devery—"Nice Day" Devery.

"Mr. Murphy, I think they're going to start something, right now and here. I don't want to get back in any such way. Can't it be stopped?"

"Better not try to interfere, Doc," he whispered hoarsely. "If Dan has a fist in the game, the best steer I can give you is to stand from under. Ask Devery!"

Devery's cheery moon-face was sober as he shook his head warningly.

"Doc, all the signs are right f'r a bad spell o' weather. It'll be healthy to come in out th' rain. If Dan is mixed up in this, he knows what he's doin'. *You* know whether you'd advise any man to fuss in, yourself. Well?"

"I know—I am just as much afraid of Dan Wheeler as Henry there, almost. But that's no reason why I should stand by and see——"

"One minute, Doc—" the Dep halted my objection with intent force—"don't get in wrong at the start! You know Dan's dead square with you. What? Well, with Dan, that means he isn't going to put you in a hole. If he lets you in for anything you don't like, you can lay your roll on it that it's the only way—or that you'd do it if you knew all the reasons, yourself. See what I mean?"

"You're right. Still, I hate to stand and look on while— What's that?"

"Sounds like they've started something sure!" The Dep stepped around the corner of the cell-stack to look and shouted: "By ——! It looks bad. Hep up, Devery!"

WE ALL three ran around the end of the cell-stack, or prison within a prison, toward the sounds of a ruction that were becoming worse. Rounding the other corner we came upon the mix-up.

Kennedy was at work on a striped pile of wriggling and gouging humanity, using now his good left hand, now the butt of his revolver, with workmanlike precision and relish. Above the hubbub his big voice boomed.

Digitized by Google

"Hup! Yah! Out o' that! —— ye! Now thin! Huh—huh!"

And as he struck, he expelled his breath with the blowing cough of a chopper on a log. With each dull *chuck* of revolver-butt on flesh-covered bone, a striped form would roll from the writhing pile, to sleep sweetly where it lay or to be snatched away by blue-coated screws that came running from all sides.

"Dig out the croaker!" the Dep directed cheerfully, as we ran to help; but before he had the words out the leonine old warrior dived into the dwindling pile and came out with a small limp scarecrow which he held up by the collar as easily as he would a kitten. And this he passed to the deputy warden with—

"Here's yer new 'croaker,' Jawn—a thrifle damaged, but thin!" He was as cool as if he were passing the time of day, but turned to his keepers with a roar. "Now, min! To the dar-rk wit' some o' these fine fellys! Him—an' him—an' him. An' chuck the big lad in Number Six by his lonesome, wit' the irons on 'um. Ar-re ye hur-rted much, lad?"

He turned to the little Jew with the kindness his big heart held for everyone.

"*Ach, mein Gott!* Led me oud of here!" sniveled the wild-eyed victim, bloody handkerchief to his generous nose; and he darted about in ineffectual efforts to get somewhere else. "My heard's-plood dey're after! Dree days all ready der big yegg hass peen after me to murder me. In sick-line I seen him—dere he iss—der murderer!"

"Stand still a minute!" I held him to look him over. "A small scalp-cut and the nose-bleed is the size of it. Come up to hospital and I'll fix you up in a minute so you can finish sick-line."

"Finish noting! I got enough!" He pulled away from me and began to sob hysterically. Then he turned on me, shaking a ridiculous fist on high. "S'all right—all right for you. But wait see what you get! You frame me—you mit der crooks. But I got friends—wait see what you get!" All the veneer of his education came off with his English and he sputtered in polyglot.

When the Jew had disappeared through the heavy doors into the office corridor, the Dep turned to me to growl:

"Pretty raw, Doc, pretty raw! But it did the trick, all right! You got your place right enough, until Jas. G. gets back anyhow. But you got four days to make good before he comes. Will I send to Charity for a 'sub' or will you finish sick-line, Doc?"

I felt as if I had been rolled in the mud myself, but there was work to do. In my old place at the doctor's desk I was soon hearing the same old complaints and giving directions to the sullen Henry. He was an efficient compounder of prescriptions, and too thoroughly cowed by Wheeler's treatment to dare to mutiny. Sick-line was finished inside ten minutes after I took charge.

The very first man in line sheered off with a grin when he saw me coming.

"Wait!" I stopped him. "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothin', Doc. Just workin' the new croaker," he mumbled sheepishly.

"Don't have another attack, or you'll get the cold-tub cure!" I warned him.

"Yes, Doctor!"

He saluted and stood over in the dinner-line, glad to get off so easily. This was the signal for half the men left in sick-line to do likewise, proving that there had been a conspiracy to oust the little Jew doctor. The balance of the men with real minor ailments told their stories with no delay.

In fifteen minutes the last dose had been swallowed, the last transfer to hospital signed, and I held an informal reception in the corridor. Screws and crooks welcomed me in various fashions. Even the Dep's cook had prepared a special lunch for me in advance, and altogether my return was made a triumphal home-coming.

But on my way from lunch the Dep stopped me and took me into his office, empty while his trusty-clerks were in the dining-room. He was mighty serious.

"Doc, you know as well as I do that Dan Wheeler, or someone for him, has put you back on the job. We know Dan has a big pull—how strong he is or how he gets it is one too many for me—but don't forget that he has enemies! No man can buck the Organization alone, and I don't know— I'll admit that it's got me guessin'.

"Never was a time since I knew New York inside politics when there was so much bein' pulled off in the dark. No man knows where he is at. What I am gettin' at is this: I been your friend from the start, as you know, and I want to say right here I wouldn't care to be in your boots when the Old Man comes back. See? I'll do what I can, but I got to hold down my

Digitized by Google

job. No man can quarrel with his bread-and-butter."

"All right, Mr. Murphy. I am hep! I don't expect you to run any risk to help me. I shall run the hospital as well as I know how and not worry about the outcome. If nobody knows anything about the 'powers that be' what's the use worrying about them?"

"Gee, Doc! I wish I had your make-up. I haven't slept six hours in six days. I hope you win out. Good luck!"

I went up to the hospital to take up my work, knowing that I had the good-will of the Dep and not much impressed by his warning of vague disaster ahead of me. Nevertheless, such things when repeated will get on the nerves of the most thick-skinned, and more warnings and hints were in store.

RADBURN was waiting to welcome me to the men's ward, looking as fresh and beefy as ever—head back-thrown to look through his nose-glasses at the same " 'aughty English angle."

"Gad, Doctor! It's been worse than rotten since you left! Lawson's the only white man left to talk to, and so help me, Bob, he's been as jolly as a bloomin' corpse this lahst week! They shipped the poor old Profess' —you know?" He dropped his chest-tones to a rumble with a glance at the German in the Professor's place at the drug-cabinet. "And this Dutch mutt is a nightmare. I hope you bounce him the first move you make. He's workin' his bloody cough-medicine graft again, and that's not half a beginning of what he's up to. If he stays up here, I want to go to the stone-quarry, and that's no guff!"

"He's not dangerous since Dan broke him," said I. "We'll see what needs doing."

And I broke away from the Englishman's gossip—I could see he was loaded for bear —to shake hands with good old Riley, the hospital keeper I had trained to a very efficient head surgical-nurse. I could see he was almost sober, in honor of my return.

"Sure glad to get you back, Doc!" His faithful eyes were actually wet, and lest he might seem soft he rolled a comical glance toward Radburn. "Did his Jukelets give ye a gracious welcome t'our mi'st? Y'ought t'see 'im tryin' t' understudy Dan an' posin' as a wild-eyed man-eater. If he keeps it up, I swear I b'lieve the Dutchman will slip cyanide in his coffee! That Henry has a trick left in 'im yet, or I'm a Ginney!"

"For a man that Wheeler broke and more than half killed," said I, "Henry seems to have got you all well bluffed. He wouldn't dare start anything!"

"Don't be too sure of that, Doc!" He stopped me as I was moving on. "If Dan was here, Henry would throw a fit at the sight of 'im. But he's got strong backin' somewheres, and he'll bear watchin'—you hear me! But Annie 'n' Aunt Mary're waitin' to fall on yer neck, on the other side. You can go right through now, fer there's nothing in the ward here. The Sheeny worked the grift to the limit, and filled us up with fakirs—anybody that had the price!"

I knew Riley spoke truth; that the little Hebrew had sent up to hospital any man who could raise the money, and that the ward contained few really sick men. But I first shook hands with Walsh, my first orderly, and a few other friends in stripes, then hurried through the heavy door to "the other side" — the women's ward — for I wanted to see my two stanch friends on the Island as much as they wanted to see me.

The fresh and wholesome head matron met me at the door.

"It's good for sore eyes to see ye back, Doctor! Here's hopin' ye've come t' stay! I know Fannie's been prayin', an' if she'd tell the truth I think Aunt Mary has too, that ye'd come back to us!" And in a low tone: "Do speak to Aunt Mary first! It's hard she's had it with th' rheumatism this week back, and she'd not let the little Jew come a-near her. Fer an hour back she's been listenin' for you. And Fannie's somewhere around."

Fair-skinned and ruddy-cheeked, Aunt Mary's face was the kindest, most motherly and benign that you can fancy. Her clear blue eyes were child-bright and keen, and where she was, there was comfort and repose. She was adviser and comforter to the sick and sorry, and queen of diamond thieves of the English-speaking world. At her eternal sewing in her sunny corner of the ward, she looked up over her spectacles and held out a shapely hand.

"My word, Doctor! But we're playin' in luck this time! And yonder comes Fannie. You'd not think she'd cried 'erself to sleep every night since you left!"

"Oh, Doctor! Have you come to stay?"

Digitized by Google

Fannie was hardly more than a child, and with her big dark eyes wet with tears she looked prettier and more innocent than ever. It was hard to believe she had shot her husband dead on Broadway, in insane jealousy. She seemed troubled, and her lips trembled as she added—

"You'd better not!"

"I stay until Jas. G. gets back, anyhow. But I thought you'd be glad to see me, if no one else was."

"Don't, Doctor!" Looking straight into my eyes, she did not seem conscious that she was holding my hand in both hers. "You better not stay. They——"

"Kendal!" Aunt Mary snapped to the trusty-orderly pottering about a near-by bed. "Cahn't you 'ear Mrs. Sullivan callin' you this 'ahlf-hour? Make 'aste now!"

The pallid smirk on Kendal's face faded to a look of terror. She scuttled off on the instant.

"Tike care 'ow you talk w'en that two-faced wench's pussy-footin' abaout!" Aunt Mary cautioned Fannie. "She lets on to be awful fond o' the Doctor, but she'd sell 'er own mother for a shillin'! But Fannie's got the rights of it, Doctor. I'd feel a sight better if Dan W'eeler was on the other side there to watch out f'r you."

"So would I. But I am here at his request, so I'm not worrying. You know he wouldn't send me back to get the worst of it. Can you tell me what it is that everybody is scared of? I have had hints until I am sick of them. I'd like something more definite."

"Aye, no doubt! One thing I'll give you to start on, and that is: Get rid of that sneakin' 'Enry, the apothecary! W'atever devilment is on, you may lay 'e's in it! And 'e 'as reason to 'ate both you and W'eeler—'e's not goin' to forget the manhandlin' Dan gave 'im as long as 'e carries the scars."

"I'll do that. Is that all?" I was sitting opposite Aunt Mary now, and Fannie on the side of the next bed was listening intently. "Can you tell me what it's all about?" I finished.

"Aye, some of it!" Aunt Mary made sure we were not overheard. "Some cove, or gang of hoperators, are usin' the Pen 'ere for a fence. There's bundles of swag passin' through 'ere on their way to Hengland and the Continong, and other bundles comes back the same wiy, that is dead sure. They 'ave used 'Enry and the little Jew croaker, and it's nuts they'll try to use you. Then w'en they find it's no go, you will know too much to be safe, then you know w'at that means! Now, Fannie, there's no good blubbin'!"

She lightly stroked the dark head, bowed in little hands through which the tears were trickling. The motherly face was full of love and pity for the miserable girl as she added:

"Stop it, now! Turn off the water-works. It does no good to anybody!"

"What kind of swag?" I asked. "Money or jewels?"

"Aye—sparks! Rare stones and big ones—so good they 'ave to be sent abroad to be sold or recut—matched pearls, and cash to be changed for Bank-of-Hengland notes. It's a cinch some guy, or gang, is gettin' together a big mess to tike out of the country—so it will be good anyw'eres—and whoever 'e is, 'e 'as strong backin'."

"Of course," I nodded. "It couldn't be worked without making it right with the Machine. But I have never been sorry I followed Dan's advice yet."

"Aye, there's the stick!" Aunt Mary was unusually impressive and excited. "It's bein' talked that Dan is in with Clark Sibley and that Holy Willie gang, and that's the very bunch that's be'ind this business, in my hopinion. But listen 'ere! You know for sure Dan is with *you*, eh?"

"Yes. I'd swear it on a stack of Bibles."

"Very well, then—" Aunt Mary was gazing thoughtfully straight into my face—"hif you're quite sure, then go a'ead! But if you ahsk me, Hi'd not mike a bloody move without seein' 'im first! W'en they come to feel you out on this smugglin' proposition, don't say aye, yes or no until you 'ave seen Dan and got 'is word you'll be looked out for—see?"

"I believe you are right, as usual," said I gratefully. "But it's hard to believe some things I have heard lately. This Clark Sib——"

"Sh-h!"

Fannie suddenly hushed me with a hand clapped over my mouth, as the same cat-footed Kendal hove in sight. After she had passed out of ear-shot it was Aunt Mary who took up the subject again.

"Don't talk about that there toff! Hit ain't 'ealthy. Hi 'ave said straight out some things that ain't supposed to be safe,

Digitized by Google

but even Hi don't care to let my face loose abaout 'im hany more than Hi'd want to gab abaout this bloody—" she took a fearsome look around before whispering—"Crimson Chamber. Though Hi'm not sure the 'ole thing ain't a bloomin' 'oax!"

The silence that followed did more to impress and scare me than all the warnings I had received. When Aunt Mary was afraid of anything, it was time to locate the tall trees for future reference. But she veered off from the subject the next minute.

"Talkin' abaout stones," she began, and with her "stones" meant diamonds. "I 'ear from Sister Mary that Mary Lloyd is back from Europe. The poor gel surely 'as 'ad 'er share of trouble."

"Why stones?" I asked. "What's the connection?"

"Connection, says you? I siy connection! Man dear, 'er grandfather 'ad a bug f'r collectin' 'em—matched pearls, too. For a score o' years 'e never missed a sale, and copped off the pick o' this country and the Continent. Not a swell gun but knows he 'ad the finest collection outside a myseum or the royal families, w'en 'e died; and 'e left every bloody cinder to the gerl. There'd be a patient for you, Doctor! Cure 'er, and you'd not need to do hanother tap for a year or two."

"Probably I shall be called in, now she is in the city!" I said sarcastically.

"Aye, w'y not?" Aunt Mary's child-blue eyes were wide and serious.

"There's another case of an innocent girl ruined to order," Fannie said. "Everybody in the 'know' is wise to the fact she was framed. And she's as sweet as she is beautiful. I'd not be surprised if you got her case, Doctor!"

"That's a poor joke!" I got up stiffly. "I happen to know she is as innocent as a babe. But you know I'm as likely to be called to attend the President as to see her professionally."

"Don't be angry, Doctor, please!" Fannie gave me a queer look. "And if you do take her case, take a fool's advice and drive with a tight rein!"

"All right, I'll remember."

I could not be angry with such a pitiful child as Fannie, for she looked upon me as her preserver and refuge. She had been near insanity from the persecution of Mrs. Darcy, the former head matron, when I came to the Pen. I had helped oust Mrs. D., and I had relieved her physical suffering besides. But her gratitude was out of all proportions—her soft brown eyes had the look of dog-devotion.

"Now then, Aunt Mary—" I turned professional—"about that rheumatism."

And so, as it always happens, twice within forty-eight hours I was urged to call on Mary Lloyd and take her case. It had been four years since I had seen the famous beauty. I remembered her more as a beautiful fairy queen than a human being—a creature above and apart from common girls—and to treat her professionally was too absurd to think of for an instant.

So I got into the harness of the prison routine without giving her case a serious thought. But the very next morning I got a note from Mary Lloyd asking me to call at the Fifth Avenue mansion the first afternoon that I was free to do so.

V

AFTER ringing the bell, I stood on the big granite steps and took one last look across at the park, where the trees and grass looked familiar and reassuring. Why had I been called to this millionaire's palace to see the world-famous beauty whose voice had fired New York at her first appearance in public? I had asked myself this question until my brains were useless.

When I told the nobleman in the doorway that I wanted to see Miss Lloyd, and that my name was Corbin, James Corbin, I was prepared to be told she was not in, or asked to state my business. Instead, the benign face lighted gravely.

"Doctor Corbin? Yes, sir. Thank you, sir. Miss Mary is expecting you and will be right down, if you will step this way, Doctor."

Across the mirror-like floor of an armored hall, into a deep-upholstered library, cool and shaded, I got without mishap. Alone, while subconsciously taking in the spacious luxury and dignity of the room, I still told myself there was some mistake.

Mary Lloyd couldn't want news of up-country folk, for she could get that from cousins just returned from a Summer on the old homestead—people of her own viewpoint. She could not want to be amused by watching me skate on the polished floors and go to the mat with the bric-à-brac.

Digitized by Google

She was not that kind. I was as twittery about the knees as if awaiting an audience with royalty, at a loss what to say or do if she appeared. Would she be a haggard and pallid invalid? No, Mrs. Jordan had said she was more lovely than. . . .

"James Corbin! Is it really you?"

Sweet and clear-cut, the words lifted me to my feet and I was in the middle of the room, holding a little velvet-elastic hand. I felt myself get red and stuttery—was trying to believe my eyes—but the vision seemed not to notice it as the bell-clear voice went on:

"It is good of you to come, James. I didn't let myself hope you'd come today. May I have that big chair moved over by the window? Please come nearer. Do you smoke?"

Smoke—in church! I don't think I said anything in answer. I only knew that she was within touch, in the soft western light from the tall window.

Hers was the beauty of the type that in print reads like a novel of days past.

She was no modern female athlete, no up-to-date woman. Her feet and hands were too small and exquisitely perfect, her eyes too large and heavy-lashed, deep and velvet-bright. But what got you most, for all her beauty of line and color, was the perfect womanliness of her, too lovely for belief. It surrounded her like an aura, warmed and thrilled you through and through.

While I was saying I did not want to smoke she was looking me steadily in the face, and for some seconds she held me flushing and tense with suspense.

"James Corbin," she said, and I jumped at the clear-cut words, "if you didn't want to come—don't want to stay—please tell me at once!"

The big deep eyes became more velvety soft as she went on sadly:

"It will be only another hope gone, and I am used to disappointments. But don't keep me in suspense! I don't blame you. No doubt you have read the papers and believed——"

"Wait!" I half rose in my chair, forced myself to sit down again and stammered: "You don't understand—I am—I haven't seen you since I was a half-grown clown, and it's your—you have taken my breath away. In plain English, I never saw any one so beautiful and I'm rattled—scared of you! As to the yellow papers, I did not read a lying word and don't know what was in 'em. I simply can't imagine why you wanted to see me."

"James, that is the most overwhelming compliment I ever got. It's plain you're not used to making pretty speeches and—you have rather taken *my* breath away!"

She made an unconscious movement of her hand toward her heart and turned so pale that I started toward her. Standing, I looked down for an embarrassed instant on the lovely head, now bowed in her hands. Then she looked up with an April smile.

"Don't be alarmed, James, I'm not going to indulge in 'high-strikes'—remember Aunt Susan's spells—but the relief was a bit sudden. I need help—need it badly, James, and if you had turned away from me—but I will tell you all about it. First, though, thank you, James!"

She gave my hand a quick pressure in both her little satiny palms. I sat down because my knees doubled under me, and she leaned toward me to ask:

"Will you take my case, please, James? I'll be very good!"

"Take your case!" I parroted the words, sure I was dreaming, and stared stupidly. "After Starrett and all the swells abroad have tried? What do I know about nervous and mental disorders? You—oh, I see!" Red to my hair, I could hear the blood roar in my ears. "You are joking. It might not seem so funny if you knew how much I really wanted to help you—and you never can tell who may——"

I was on my feet again when once more she caught my hand and took the stiffening out of my knees. She said with slow emphasis—

"James, do you believe I am sane?"

"You—why—of course!"

"Well then, I know what I want, and I want you to take my case more than anything in this world. I remember you as a big strong boy who always did what he started out to do, and I know you can help me if you will. Are you going to do it? Think well before you refuse!"

There was a silence in which I got my bearings and realized she was a girl of flesh and blood; also that she was in big trouble. I answered with slow distinctness:

"Yes, I will do it. But you are going to do just what I say, and no questions asked!" Then at a quiver of the delicate lips I

Digitized by Google

repented. "Now—you said you wouldn't, you know! But I can't take any case on any other terms."

"It's the same thing over again, James! If I looked like crying, it was because I am so happy. It's like relief from long pain—to feel the grip of a firm hand. I promise to do any and every single thing you say, and no questions asked; but you must give me one privilege at the start. I have sent for you as my physician, and I must pay you the same fee I paid Dr. Starrett!"

"That would be a joke. I'm not even registered!"

"That has nothing to do with it! You can cure me and he can't. I ought to pay more, but I shall not employ you for less. I mean that!"

I found she did. Although she showed real terror lest I should not take her case, she would not go on under any other arrangement, so I gave in for the time being. Happily relieved, she wanted to begin at once on the history of her case, so I asked the usual questions.

Her family history and inherited temperament I already knew, also her own life up to the time of her engagement to the wealthy young society-leader. I had heard of Clark Sibley as a power in New York, with influence that was as mysterious as his origin, for he was not one of the old families, nor a new-rich upstart. But he was received almost everywhere and his name was spoken almost in a whisper. From Mary Lloyd I heard of a new Sibley, however, and had hard work to preserve a professional calm.

What she saw in my face I don't know, but as she went on she lost all reticence—spoke out the horrible truth, as far as it was possible for her pure mind to comprehend it. Such men I knew existed. I had learned of them from Radburn the actor, or I could not myself have understood.

THE Sibley of the society columns and the leader in plans for social betterment was one side of a dual personality; the other was a degenerate monster—hidden from the world and living a life unmentionable. He had shown himself only at his best to her, until he had a grip on her high-strung and imaginative temperament, then he had taken a pervert's foul pleasure in attempting to drag her down.

Her rare innocence only excited his passions; when she recoiled from him in horror he held her by a hypnotic power that was only made stronger by her fear and disgust. That hold he still retained, more than a year after their engagement had been broken. Not satisfied by having set filthy tongues wagging—telling lies about her that she did not half understand even now—to ostracize her and rob her of her friends, he kept her in constant terror of what he might do next.

This terror kept her in the modern palace that had become her prison—afraid to step outside the door. When she had tried to go out she said she had been driven back by a force she could not resist. Only three times had she left the house since her return from Europe; then she had been carried out and put in a closed car that took her to the ferry. In that way she had visited Fort Wadsworth and Mrs. Col. Jordan.

In pallid fear she whispered that Sibley had gotten hold of half the fortune left her by her dead uncle, a large part of his collection of rare gems; that not only was she afraid to make complaint, but that her one remaining relative—Uncle John, with whom she lived—advised her to say nothing about the jewels. Then I asked—

"Why should he be afraid—a man of his millions and influence?"

"I don't know, James. He acts as if he would give the impression that I am not sane—that my notion that I have lost the jewels is a delusion of persecution. But that is not in your line—the jewels, I mean. What I want is to be cured of this fear. If I am held in its grip much longer I shall be insane, sure enough!" She was searching my face with pitiful suspense. "Is it hopeless? Must I live under this nightmare until I am put in an asylum or—dead?"

Mechanically I reached for my stethoscope in my inside coat-pocket, because I didn't know what else to do. Having got it out I used it—listened to her heart and lungs, thus gaining time to think. When I had finished I had made up my mind. She was physically perfect, and a girl of singular force of character, but under a singular obsession. I pocketed my stethoscope and said cheerfully—

"Get on your things and we'll take a walk in the park, feed the squirrels and soak in some Spring sunshine—best medicine in the world!"

Digitized by Google

Her pupils dilated, then she shook her head sadly.

"No, that won't do. Bechter, the famous German, tried laughing it out of me, but I got worse. I should faint or make a scene, and not sleep for two nights."

"Not this time. Get your bonnet and shawl!"

"But, James—" the dark eyes snapped—"I tell you I can't. I won't have it! Bullying will do no good, or——",

"Your bonnet and shawl! You promised," said I blandly. "What's the name of your trained-nurse-keeper?"

"Miss Stone. How did you know I had one?"

"She's listening. Miss Stone!"

"Yes, Doctor!" Miss Stone appeared from the hall with the wraps. "Here they are."

She was a nerve-case nurse, from pleasantly grim face to square-toed shoes, and she had her patient ready in a minute. Mary Lloyd gave me a look that was meant to be withering, but was strangely attractive as she said—

"You'll just have to carry me into the house from the sidewalk—if we get down the steps."

"That will be nice. Will you take my arm?" Since she did not answer I tried again. "Was this Bechter person young and—good-looking?"

WITH head up, she walked to the door, opened by the dignified statesman in livery, and straight down the steps. I kept at her elbow, ready to catch her but not looking her way. On the contrary, I swept the sky and the park before us with a cheerful:

"Great weather! See how the leaves are coming on!"

No answer. We had walked almost half a block before she turned to me with a blinding smile.

"James, that was a stroke of genius! I never was more angry in my life, just for a minute, and that was long enough to make me forget. Did you mean to do it?"

"I did, and it worked," said I. "But now, if you must faint I would recommend the grass in the park."

"I think," she said slowly, looking at me the while, "that I'd rather feed the squirrels. Also I think—some other things I shall not tell you, because they wouldn't be good for you!"

We fed the squirrels, and her happiness just to be in the open and free from fear was something pitiful to tears. I had to insist that we go home before she got too tired, and it was dusk when the liveried potentate opened the door to let us in. He looked severely aloof, as if he would not be answerable for the consequences and considered such doings beneath his notice. Miss Stone was warmly approving, removed Miss Mary's wraps as if she did this thing every day, and spoke to me in the low familiar tone that implies a perfect understanding.

"Mr. Burton would like to speak to you, Doctor. He's in his den beyond the library."

"I expect we'll both catch it, James!" my patient smiled up at me.

Now Mary Lloyd was above ordinary flirting, or man-hunting just to take scalps, for she had always been pursued by humble admirers; but no man with blood in his veins could be near her an hour and escape unscathed. I am free to admit that the way she spoke to me before the nurse made me dizzy. Miss Stone, too, smiled her approval as she said:

"I don't think it. I think your uncle wants to consult the doctor himself, professionally. He has not been well lately."

"Let's pray that is it," Miss Mary said. "James, can you come tomorrow—if only for a few minutes? And am I to take any medicine?"

"No drugs. I shall give the next dose tomorrow at the same hour. Good night."

"Good night! And good luck with Uncle John!"

I expected to need my rabbit's foot, as Dan Wheeler would say, in the interview ahead. Uncle John was a severe martinet of Puritan upbringing, and I retained all my boyhood's fear of him as I entered his den.

IT WAS no place to lounge and smoke, but a neat hermit's cell with haircloth and mahogany furniture of the last generation. Uncle John—we had all called him that—got up ro shake hands with me. He was a "fighting Burton," every inch of his five-feet-seven, with short gray mustache and square-cleft chin. His keen gray eyes bored mine, not unkindly but with good penetration.

"Well, James! Aren't you ashamed of

Digitized by Google

yourself, young man!" He held my hand in an iron grip, then little wrinkles came around his eyes. "Six months in New York and we have to send for you professionally to get a look at you!

"Have you forgotten your mother was a Burton, sir—" he gave my hand a final grip and dropped it—"or are you ashamed of your family?"

"It is a shame," I admitted. "The New York Burtons are so clannish, too. Mrs. Jordan said she never sees you from one Summer to the next, up in Vermont."

"A hit, sir! A very palpable hit! Here is one chair you can ride without holding on. I keep this room as it is because your great-aunt furnished it. Now to come to business at once. I am not sick—never lost a day in forty years—but I want to talk to you. First—is Mary going to be herself again?"

"I think so, if she is left alone and treated right."

"Treated right—you mean professionally?"

"No, sir, I mean humanly. She is sound in mind and body, but she has been abused—persecuted—and she feels it. All that ails her now is the effects of suffering and fear. All the medicine she needs is happiness and peace."

There was a silence for a space, in which the keen eyes dropped to the pencil with which he was tapping the desk-top. At length Uncle John spoke, and quite softly.

"What do you recommend—for her?"

"Out-of-doors, every day; some amusement; freedom from fear; and the companionship of young folks who are congenial and who like her. She will do the rest, if she is furnished with the companions, all right; that is, she will make anybody like her if she is let alone. What sort of a cad is this Clark Sibley? Why has he ruined her socially and stolen her gems?"

As I went on talking I got more confidence—got more heated and indignant as I finished:

"Why have his lies gone unchallenged? And why was he permitted to rob her?"

Then I expected a broadside. Instead, the captain of industry and man of big affairs still looked at the pencil tapping the desk and spoke with cold precision:

"You are taking her word for the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!"

"Has she lied to me?" I asked quickly. "Pardon me if I seem disrespectful. But what are the exact facts?"

"James—" still he spoke dispassionately to the pencil—"I know nothing against Clark Sibley, barring his origin, for nobody knows where he came from, and I never listen to rumors or scandal. On the other hand, Mr. Sibley has great influence in the organization that governs New York—and runs it better than most American cities. So it would be folly to make an enemy of him. I will admit that I should not want to do it, and I'd advise you not to make accusations without facts to back them."

Here he looked up at me, and under his fierce bushy eyebrows his eyes appeared strangely subdued as he finished:

"Listen to an old man, James, one that knows New York, and don't make an enemy of that man. Don't talk about him!" And he dropped his tone to a whisper, looking furtively toward the door.

For the first time I noticed that he was haggard and pale. He got up with a start, opened the door into the library, made sure no one was listening and came back to say:

"If I had said what you have just said, I should not consider it safe to go back to Blackwell's Island alone, James. I am ashamed to admit it, but it is true!"

"And the Crimson Chamber—" it popped out, of itself, before I thought— "are you——"

I stopped and jumped up with the impulse to catch the old gentleman, for he staggered as if struck in the face. But he put a hand to his moist forehead, sat down and said weakly:

"For God's sake, James Corbin, what do you know? Have you come to call me to account? Well—I am ready!"

I wanted to help him but did not know how. While I stared, sinking to the edge of my chair, he got hold of himself again and his voice came back.

"Who told you about the Crimson Chamber—and how much did they tell you? Does Mary know?" he asked abruptly.

"No. And I only know it is a scheme to bleed and terrorize rich men. When you looked so distressed, it recalled what I had heard of it. I did not intend to——"

"It was a random shot, then. Well, James, it looks as if you were on my track and I may as well make a clean breast and confess."

While he paused to ring for a whisky

Digitized by Google

and soda, a rare indulgence with him, I wanted to stop him from talking but did not know how. For I saw one of my idols tottering to its fall. I had always looked upon him as the soul of integrity and courage, and still had too much admiration for him to want to hear confessions. However, he wanted to get it off his mind and he was a Protestant, so he had to confess to a doctor.

It wasn't so bad, after all. He had been kidnapped on his way home from his office and confined in the Crimson Chamber until he paid his ransom, and the price of his release had included a large share of Mary Lloyd's inheritance of rare gems.

"I can't tell you why I did it, James. I have often thought, since then, that I would let them kill me as they threatened to do, rather than rob the poor girl to save a worthless life. But she would have no protector with me out of the way. If she were only married to Clark Sibley she would be safe."

"Then don't you think he is connected with the Crimson Chamber?"

"Heavens, no! He has been robbed himself, and he is the only victim who has dared speak to me about it. He has hopes of breaking up the infernal gang, whoever they are, and of finding the death-trap in which they shut their dupes."

"Has he any clue? Are there any detectives on the trail of——"

"Not a clue! And even Sibley does not dare mention his experience except to a fellow-sufferer. He is convinced they would carry out their threat of death to any man who talks."

"But you are telling me!"

"Because I am going to ask you not to follow up the matter of the missing jewels—Mary's jewels. I am only living to make it up to her. They almost ruined me. I am just getting my head above water again, and any further strain would send me under. You see how it is?"

"Yes, I see. The whole thing is such a mixed-up mess at present that I don't see how I can do any good by meddling. My job is to get Mary Lloyd on her feet, and to do my work on the Island. I must get back to the Pen now."

"Miss Stone tells me you have worked a miracle already, James."

He stood erect, once more the man of steel I had always known, and I felt a boy again. He gave me a parting grip as he said:

"We all have faith in you, and if you can help that girl we can still afford to make it worth your while, my boy. But don't forget what I have told you. Better let me send you to the foot of Fifty-second Street in the carriage?"

"Thanks, I'd rather walk. And there's no danger. Good night!"

"Ah, young blood! Young blood!"

He shook his head with a faint smile on his stern lips and saw me to the door with affectionate solicitude. I walked to Fifty-second Street with my head high, but with never a suspicion that Uncle John's caution was justified. It was weeks afterward that I learned that on that walk I was doubly shadowed, followed by two men, one looking for a chance to sand-bag me and the other to protect me.

Meanwhile I was congratulating myself on my success with my first big case, sure I could take care of myself anywhere, and generally patting myself on the back for a fine fellow. Thus we all play our little parts in the big comedy called "Life."

VI

"THINGS must be looking up with you, Doctor. You are diked up to the queen's taste these days."

Lawson's eyes wrinkled pleasantly at the corners as he looked up over the cigarette he was rolling in after-dinner comfort. We had dined well in my cosey little office in the Pen hospital, and the other two members of our usual table-quartette had left—Radburn the actor to go to bed with a headache, and Dietmann the night drug-orderly to attend to a call on the tiers. It was the third evening after my first call on Mary Lloyd, and I had not mentioned my beautiful patient to anybody in the Pen except Aunt Mary. Therefore I was startled when the gentlemanly little night-keeper added—

"How is the swell patient coming on?"

"Fine!" I answered coolly. "Goes out every day, and tomorrow night I am going to take her to the theatre, with a supper at Moreau's afterward."

"Mm-hm! Rad has got your tickets—a box, in fact." Lawson scratched his match and spoke between puffs. "How's it feel to escort a raging beauty? Had any trouble yet?"

"Tickets—a box!" I stared in astonishment. "What are you talking about?

Digitized by Google

How did you—I didn't know anybody knew about it. I never said a word to him or——"

"Hush, man!" said Lawson through a rich mouthful of smoke. "You know the prison telegraph knows everything about you, as well as the rest of us. But what I am getting at is this: Did you know there's a story going the rounds of the tiers that you and Dan Wheeler have had a falling-out?"

"I haven't seen him since I—since I took up this job this time. How could I have any row with him?"

"That's just the point—why I mentioned Miss Lloyd. You are known to be treating her, and Wheeler is known to be hand-in-glove with Clark Sibley. See?"

"But Dan——" I started to say that Wheeler had got me back on the Island, but thought better of it. I shook my head. "I give it up! I don't know where I am at, or anything about anything! Only I am getting lots of advice these days. I expect every man on the streets to stop me and tell me to be careful not to do something or other. Now what are you going to warn me about?"

"I was going to do something like that, and it is no joke, I want to tell you!"

The little man leaned forward earnestly.

"I know, they all whisper and watch the keyhole. Fire when you're ready!" said I. "I haven't had a stage-whisper session for three days, and I was just getting so I could let all my weight down in my chair. Now you've got me on edge again and you might better let it all out."

"This is the first chance I have had."

He too made sure he was not overheard in the dark ward outside. All the men were in their cots except Walsh, now night-nurse, reading at a dim light half down the long ward. Lawson came back to his chair and put up his feet on the radiator.

"Are you going to ship Henry, as you said?" he asked.

"I think so. Why?"

"Because he was put here for a purpose, and it might make trouble for you."

Lawson's ease was plainly assumed. He stopped smoking as he again questioned me.

"Have you been asked to pass on anything—any parcels?"

"Not a thing."

"What if you were?"

"That would depend. I don't know."

"Depend on your own judgment, or on your instructions?" he asked shrewdly.

"Oh what I was told to do, I expect." I tried to read his blank face. "I imagine we are all carrying out orders more or less blindly. Why are you pumping me?"

"For that very reason, because I am carrying out orders. I have a little sealed packet in my pocket right now, and it has got to be taken to the boat-landing inside an hour. I was told to tell you it was a part of your job to take it there. And that lets me out!"

He threw aside the cigarette that had begun to burn his fingers and started to roll another, avoiding my eyes. I knew he held his position under the protection of a machine politician, and that to fail to carry out orders meant the loss of his prospects. I did some hurried calculations and said:

"I will take it, this time. Did the little Jew doctor do this messenger-boy job?"

"Yes. Here's the packet. Don't show it to a soul, or admit you've got it, until you ask, 'Who for?' and get the answer, 'For the boss.' "

He slipped a small wrapped package into my side pocket, whispering:

"Better not look at it, then you can't ever be sure you can identify it!" Dietmann's steps sounded on the stairs, and Lawson added: "Hurry! Through the other side. Ask Miss Slattery to let you out the blind door!"

At the same time he unlocked the door and half pushed me through into the women's ward. Miss Slattery, night-matron, was waiting for me. Without a word from me she said:

"Aunt Mary wants a word with you before you go out, Doctor. Yes, it's all right—she's in the know."

I kept a wise silence and went with her to Aunt Mary's bed where a dim night-light burned behind a screen. Bolstered up by reason of asthma, Aunt Mary held up a finger for silence until Slattery was out of hearing.

"Did you say a word to Slattery, Doctor?"

"Not a word! But she said——"

"Never mind w'at she said! She doesn't know a bloomin' thing, only she's to pass you out. Got your loot?"

"I've got something, I don't know what. I was wishing I might have a chance to ask you about it. Suppose Dan would want me to do this?"

Digitized by Google

"Aye, he'll want you to do it, right enough. I'd not be surprised if you saw 'im waitin' for you. But listen! If you find some other Johnny waitin' at the landin', don't be in too big a 'urry to 'and over the package to 'im. Be as slow as you know 'ow in givin' the pass-word. If you 'ear two w'istles, and then two more, take to your 'eels! Run like the devil toward w'erever the two w'istles come from—and *dodge sideways!* They might cut loose at you, d'ye see? Say it over!"

"I am to be as slow as possible about giving up the package to anybody but Wheeler, and if I hear two whistles I am to hang to it and run. That right?"

"Aye! What's the time?"

"Ten-thirty. Say—they wouldn't shoot. They'd be heard."

"They'd 'ave their rods Maxim-silenced, up to dite, all right. Now mike 'iste! This is close-joinin'!"

In her rare excitement Aunt Mary's insular English was all but unintelligible to me, but I hurried down-stairs and into the chilly Spring night, feeling that this was all unreal and impossible. If I had had time to think about it I doubt if I should have gone at all.

THERE was a rowboat at the float where the doctor's launch landed in daytime, and two men squatted in it. As I approached, a low hiss warned me to be silent, and one of them got out stiffly. I could see, even in the dim light, that the man coming to meet me was not Wheeler. I slowed up as he came up the steps.

"Well," the man spoke in a low rumble, "have you got it?"

"Who's that in the boat?" I asked the first thing I could think of.

"None of your business. Hep up! Are you wise?"

"Yes." I looked all about and saw nobody else in sight. "I have it. Who for?"

"For the boss. What d'you want to stall for? Why didn't you come through without chewin' the rag?"

Even as he spoke, my eyes, used to the dark now, saw a small motor-launch coming fast with no lights; and two shrill whistles were quickly followed by two others.

I couldn't run straight toward it. The man speaking to me suddenly stopped and called to the other.

"Come on, Blink! A double-cross! Any way to get 'im!" And he darted at me with the words.

I dodged his advance, doubling and turning toward the upper end of the float where the approaching launch would land. The second man from the rowboat saw my purpose and headed me off, running along the float. At the same instant Wheeler's voice came from the fast-nearing launch.

"Tackle him, Doc! Into the drink with him. Hit him hard!"

I got a glimpse of the great cracksman's erect figure in the bow—hands at mouth as a trumpet—and obeyed blindly, diving at the thighs of the man who now crouched at the top of the steps. The familiar words, so often heard on the gridiron, were the only ones that would have started so prompt a reflex; and another half-second would have been too late. In my hesitation the man who had first accosted me had crept up behind, struck at me with a clubbed gun even as I dived, but only caught me a glancing blow behind the ear.

I got my man, struck him heavily, and we rolled breakneck down the steps to the float. "Number one" meanwhile hovered after us for a chance to get in a crack with his reversed weapon.

It was a dummy struggle I was doing, for I had knocked my man half-senseless and was only using him as a shield for my own head, keeping him between me and the vicious attacks of the thug above me while I wriggled and rolled toward the edge of the float. One more glancing blow on the head made me see a flashing light.

I kicked out savagely at the bending body above and flopped off into the icy river, my limp opponent still in my arms. The shock revived the man enough to make him clutch me desperately as we sank down and down. It seemed hours before we came to the top, to go down again slowly, the half-senseless man clawing frantically at my throat and arms.

I kept up a hopeless struggle to free my limbs, but my strength was going, my lungs bursting, when I felt a tug at my hair and was dragged on to the float, gasping and struggling.

"Good leather, Doc!" It was Dan's welcome voice above me. "Wish I had a dozen like you. Did Slim crack your nut? Let's see!"

While I was still getting rid of salt water,

Digitized by Google

he was deftly exploring my head with those wondrously light hands, flashing a pocket-light that blinded me.

"All to the good, Doc! Only split your mat a trifle," he announced, swiftly binding my cut scalp with a handkerchief before he stood up.

"Got your bird trussed, son?" he asked.

"He'll do, I reckon—with watching!" It was White's deep voice, and I raised to my elbow to see the big ex-cowboy get up, leaving a prostrate figure lying on the float with hands tied behind him. "How goes it Doc?" He came to me at once. "We'd been here first, only I'm new to the job and ——that bubble-boat squizzled on us. Man, that was some tackle you made. Can you toddle? Lemme help!"

Tenderly as a woman he raised me up, wrapping me in his own heavy ulster and saying comfortingly the while:

"That's the hammer! By golly! You must have an armor-plate block on you, or that yegg would 'a' stove it in, Doc! I had you booked for a sure-dead Indian when you struck the drink. There we are, up-an-comin' and full o' meanness! Can you make 'er go alone?"

"Sure—I only got a glancing blow, but that other one mighty near drowned me." I looked around for the man I had tackled. "What became of my friend?"

"Don't ask impertinent questions, Doc!"

It was Wheeler who answered. He had been frisking the prone figure on the float, and now stood up, putting something in his pocket. With hardly a moment's hesitation he again bent over the bound man, freed his hands and feet and touched him with his shoe.

"Stand up!" he commanded.

The man scrambled to his feet and Wheeler flashed his pocket-light in his face. It was a face that belonged in the rogues' gallery, and it fell cowed and sullen before Wheeler—the man feared by every crook in the country. The flash had surprised a furtive look toward the rowboat. Wheeler's low tone now took on the venomous rasp that seemed to search the man to his boot-taps.

"Slim Lambert—I had the goods on you before—could send you up the river for a lifer any minute. Now I got your outfit, wax, seal and all, and you know where you get off if the Main Guy gets wise to your graft. Close your map!"

With the hoarse command he again flashed the light, printing on the dark background the white face of the terrified crook, mouth open and eyes bulging. Wheeler stepped nearer and raised a dangerous hand before the cringing wretch.

"You been holding out—sticking to part of every box of cinders that went through your dirty hooks! What about the papers?"

"I never touched 'em—never opened 'em!" stammered the frightened yegg. "I had no use for papers, so help me!"

"That'll be all!" Wheeler stopped him. "This is your finish in New York. You can stick to the sparks you've got, and I give you until daylight to pull your freight. You for a fade-away! Show that ugly map in New York after 6 A. M—or belch to the Main Guy on my game and you don't go up the river—you go down! Got that?"

"I'm on," came the shivering whisper. "Can I go now?"

In answer the king of gamblers only flashed the light, giving a last instantaneous picture of the evil face, lighted with hope, furtively slanting an eager glance toward his boat. Wheeler turned on his heel toward White and me, with never a look toward the scuttling crook who darted to the skiff and pulled into the dark with hardly a splash of an oar.

I got a glimpse of his flat ugly profile turned over his shoulder toward the city's lights, as White commented—

"Pleased to death to make his getaway with his pile!" Then he turned to me. "Your other friend left us suddener than that, Doc. One look at friend Wheeler here and 'his Thuglets' struck the East River all spraddled out; made more noise than a Mississippi side-wheeler goin' upstream. What you s'pose he's doin' right now?"

"I'd like to know he got ashore. I don't like to feel that I am to blame for his—going to the bottom," said I, and looked appealingly at Wheeler. "Think he got out, Dan?"

Wheeler stood erect and trim, hands in the pockets of his well-fitting overcoat, and his keen powerful face showed grimly handsome in the dim light as he turned to us.

"Make no mistake, youngsters," said he not unkindly. "You got me down for a man-eater without bowels. Get this straight! I never croak a man for fun. See? But I

Digitized by Google

don't lose sleep over a cheap crook more or less—if he can't swim, he can't belch. And in this game one yegg isn't ace-high. Get me?"

As he spoke I was reminded of the packet intrusted to me and felt frantically through my wet pockets. It was gone! The dropping at the pit of my stomach was a positive pain.

"Dan!" I gasped. "The packet—it's gone!"

"Forget it, Doc!" Wheeler held up the water-soaked little package. "It's waterproof, but I got to go through it and seal it up again with the wax and seal Slim has been using, to make sure it hasn't been disturbed."

"But nobody had a chance to touch it. It hasn't been out of my pocket until you——"

"Wouldn't it jolt you, Doc, to hear I found it in Blink's pocket when I fished you out?"

And I could see the gleam of Wheeler's narrowed eyes as I protested:

"He couldn't frisk me under water! It's impossible, and he couldn't do a thing. But look! White just said that he took to the water at sight of you. How could you have gone through his pockets?"

"Figure it out, Doc. You got a college education! Try logarithms!" Dan turned to White. "Well, son, think you can tickle that bubble so she'll take us to the pier? I'd sooner be shot out of a gun than ride anything that burns benzine, but on the water is the best place to open this little box of tricks, and I want you both along this trip."

"Doc, here, is cold and wet as a frog," muttered White as he went to the launch and turned the motor over. "I'm only the engineer, and an amachure at that, but Doc will sure get a dose of pneumonia."

"He'll get nothing—but wise to his job!" Wheeler caught him up sharply. "I'm going to show you two the leak that is keeping 'em awake in Washington—the identical hole that lets out the plans for harbor-defense, as well as a whole lot of oof, money and jewels."

"We're not kicking," said I. "I'm all right. Want any help, White?"

The motor started its muffled sputter just then, and Wheeler got into the bow saying meanwhile:

"You overgrown kids don't get hep to the size of this contract—yet! I'm going to show you something to set you thinking. Besides, if an old crook named Sled Wheeler should turn up his toes, there'll be two husky youngsters to put Uncle Sam's sleuths on the right scent. And I see their finish." He said that last under his breath.

Neither White nor I having any ideas at the moment, Wheeler presently added:

"Well, Doc, if your heavy thinks won't swamp this stuttering canoe, pile in! I'll show you the 'hole-in-the-wall' that's making all the trouble!"

I GOT in with White and huddled over the motor for warmth while we slid down-stream close under the granite wall of the Island. Wheeler worked over the packet in the bow of the little craft, now and then flashing his light under cover of his coat.

"How long since you got to be a harbor-pilot?" I whispered to White.

"Been through more'n that since I saw you last," White answered in a low rumble. "Takin' a course in boxin'—brass-knucks an' all. Know Jem Taylor, the English ex-champ?"

"Yeh! Doc has taken lessons of him!"

Wheeler's ears were something uncanny and he went on briskly:

"Go to the gym and look Taylor up tomorrow, Doc—want you both in training. You never can tell! Here, take a peep, both of you!"

We clambered forward to peer under Wheeler's coat-flaps where he cautiously turned his light on the open box. I knew nothing about gems, but the sight fairly dazzled me. White drew in his breath through his teeth, and I remembered his peculiar hobby was jewels—now that he had a lot of money. He whispered:

"Shut 'em up! I'd hate to think what I'd do for a handful of that box—take 'em away! I'm tempted to try to swim!"

His face at my shoulder was fixed and staring, fascinated, and Wheeler waited an instant before shutting off the light with the crisp order:

"Get your hooks on that wheel, or we all swim! Head for the second green light—stop her sputtering and keep mum while we sneak in between the freighter and the dock. Not a peep above a whisper after we round the big boat's bow, so get this right!"

By the time he had made White recite his

Digitized by Google

directions we were close under the bowsprit of the huge ocean liner. Dan thrust a boat-hook into my hands and gave the word to stop the launch's motor. It was dark to blackness in the space we entered between the huge hull of the vessel and the slimy planking of the pier.

We fended and felt our way with our boat-hooks—White and I—while the grim cracksman in the bow sat motionless. In this way we slid two-thirds the liner's length, safe from discovery by reason of the dark and the noises of the loading of the vessel, a steady rumbling roar. Yet, for all the noise of the stevedores that would have drowned a shout, Wheeler at last signaled us to stop only by a low hiss.

Taking my boat-hook he drew the little launch close to the planking and knocked gently—three quick knocks on the wet planks, then two, then one. He waited a few seconds, then moved on a boat's-length and tried again.

At the third attempt he was answered by a tapping on the other side of the planks. After a second interchange of raps there was a sound of sliding bolts. A narrow strip of blacker darkness showed that a four-foot-square door of planking swung outward, just far enough to take in the precious package. Then the square settled back in place, the bolts clanked softly and Wheeler pushed off with the boat-hook. In the same silence we worked our way out as we had come in.

Not a word was spoken until we were well out in the river. I could see Wheeler sitting in the bow. In the dim reflection of the city's light his face was grim, watching, startling as always in its ruthless power, and now keenly intent on us. White started uneasily.

"Is that all? What's next on the bill-of-fare?"

As the big Westerner's voice broke the silence, Wheeler's thin lips twitched in his nearest approach to a smile.

"You're elected, neighbor! I'd have laid my pile on you!" Without explaining this speech, he went on. "That's the size of it, for this trip! Take Doc back to the Island."

And as White started the motor and headed for Blackwell's Island, Wheeler asked him:

"What d'you want for your money? Hanker to go through that square 'hole-in-the-wall,' or to get your hooks on the sparks?"

"If that hole goes to the Crimson Chamber, what's the matter with going through it?" White was hot and a bit contemptuous.

"How old are you, son?"

At the cold razor-edge on Dan's tone I shivered. It may have been the wet clothes, but I had heard that tone before and did not like it. White, too, spoke more quietly.

"Twenty-eight. Why?"

"Not many years to live. If you want to make it twenty-nine keep out of the square hole—don't say 'Square Hole' or 'Crimson Chamber,' and if you talk in your sleep, bunk alone!"

To get the thrill you have to know Dan Wheeler, feel the impact of the man's virility that made his words bore in like a rifle-shot. I saw White's face stiffen with the fighting-spirit that is roused when two real men come together. He took his time and answered deliberately, his bass voice deeper than ever.

"Oh, well! I don't know. Suppose I don't make it twenty-nine? I allow this old river would roll on just the same."

"Yeh! And it would roll over your stiff, son!" Wheeler responded instantly. "You wouldn't be the first man that has butted in on that game—gone into the square hole full of fight and never come out. Ever hear of Doc Graham? He was about your build."

"I have," I said, startled by the name of the young physician whose name had been coupled with that of Mary Lloyd. "He disappeared—was supposed to have gone to South America."

"He never got farther than the dock of the —— —— Line!" Wheeler responded. "That same pier you saw tonight. Drag the bottom under that pier and it's good betting you'd fish up Graham—what's left of him—and find weights in his pockets!"

"But the papers—the police!" White protested. "Ain't there a man with sand enough to raise a holler? Out West this thing——"

"Ah, forget it!" Wheeler waved the idea away in disgust. "The reporters are wise, all right. The story's loaded and they pass it up or lose their jobs. The bulls are fixed, too—a stiff don't sign any pay-checks. But make no mistake, son, all the sand is not west of the Mississippi, nor all the brains. Get me?" Dan began to speak crystal-clear English; that meant business. "This frame-up is complete. It's a strong combination we're up against, with a man of

Digitized by Google

brains at the head—a dangerous man, and no bullhead can land him. It will take a man with *more* brains, one who can outguess him, to turn the trick.

"So far we haven't spotted this Main Guy—don't know who he is." Without raising his voice or moving a muscle, Wheeler paused an instant, and then his every slow word landed like a bullet. "You wait, son. We got the trail. And we get a look at all the stuff that goes out of the country by this route. That means Uncle Sam can keep one jump ahead of the Government that is paying for the stolen plans. See? Just so long as Uncle Sam's men know what plans are stolen, just so long they can make better plans—and New York is safe. Got that?"

"Yes!" we both whispered at the same time.

"Yes?" Dan's tone was sarcastic. "Good! Freeze to it, that's all!"

"But the—the millions in jewels!" we again broke out together.

"Cut no ice—none whatever!" Dan finished easily. "The boobs that lose 'em can afford it. But wait! Just wait until I lay my hand on the—Main Guy!"

In the half-dark he reached out and slowly closed the smooth white hand that had broken strong men.

After a space White leaned back with a long breath, and spoke with deep satisfaction.

"Thanks, neighbor. I see where I'm at now, and I'm in the game to a finish!"

"That's why you're here," Wheeler responded, and turned to me. "What's your complaint, Doc?"

It was one of his mind-reading centershots, and drew from me just what I was thinking.

"I don't see where I am at, yet. How about Mary Lloyd's case? It looks to me as if this man Sibley were mixed up in this horrible plot. And yet they say you and Sibley are—friends?" I stopped uncomfortably, but Wheeler did not help me out, so I asked, "How about that?"

"Who said?" Dan rasped.

"Now I think of it, it wasn't friends," I hedged. "They said you were running the swell gambling-joint for him or in company with him."

"That's right—not for publication," Wheeler admitted. "What then?"

"What do I do? I want to help her to get her—her health and her wealth back again. Do I go ahead, wherever the trail leads?"

"Sure! Do your best! But, Doc, listen. You look up this Sibley, get acquainted with him, and you'll change your mind!"

A reflected glint of light showed Dan's face, and his thin lips were slightly curved in a merciless half-smile. But we were nearing the Island and before I could get a second look it was too dark to see clearly.

There was a silence while White headed the launch in toward the hospital landing—Charity and the Pen used the same landing in those days—and I was doing some mixed thinking. I was free to help Mary Lloyd. I must be mistaken about Sibley, whom I already hated unseen. And I had been told to steer clear of him. Now Wheeler told me to get acquainted.

As always, however, Wheeler's compelling personality carried away all prejudice; I had to do his bidding. More to break silence than for information I at length asked—

"And we are all to get in training, just as if we were going to——"

"To fight for your lives—you never can tell!" Dan took the words from my teeth. "I am taking the same dose. Go to Sanders' gym tomorrow and put yourself in Taylor's hands. Cut out booze and tobacco. And again—" he raised an imperative finger—"we shall meet there—Castleman, you two, and I, and probably Sibley. Get in with him, all of you, for he's about the whole cheese. But we four can't be too thick. Remember we're up against a smooth bunch and the less we are seen together the better. Got that, White? We four keep all spraddled out?"

Although he spoke good-naturedly, the big Westerner was watching him in breathless fascination, and answered submissively:

"Yes, sir! Anything else? Do I just hang around and wait for orders?"

"You won't get gray waiting," said Dan. "Watch your wheel, there!"

For the absorbed pilot was steering head-on for the float. With a whirl of the wheel he brought the little craft neatly alongside and held to the ring while I got out.

Wet and cold, I clambered stiffly to the float and turned to say good night.

"Get a warm tub and rub-down. Wake up Walsh and tell him I said so," Dan gave me as a parting charge. "And cheer up,

Digitized by Google

Doc! Better times and good money ahead. Good night and good luck!"

I have often thought the man actually had me hypnotized, for I obeyed him unthinkingly, and I was half asleep when Walsh put me to bed and tucked me in like an infant, with my scalp-wound neatly dressed.

VI

"WELL, Doctor, 'ow's your swell patient on the havenue? Ain't she a 'owlin' beauty, though? And she's got brains as well, I 'ear!"

Aunt Mary took the first chance to speak to me alone, the very next afternoon. It was no surprise to me that she knew of my visit of the day before; the prison telegraph I knew kept the convicts posted on the doings of the chief characters of their little world. But she had prophesied that I should be called.

"How did you know that I was going to be called in to take her case?" I asked as I bandaged her knee. The kind, keen blue eyes twinkled through her spectacles.

" 'Ow do I know you're goin' to tike 'er t' the theater, and t' supper hahfterwards, this very night as ever was?" she retorted.

"Give it up! Probably Sister Mary put you wise to the other—but I haven't told a soul about the supper tonight. Perhaps you can tell me where to go for the supper?"

"Aye, 'appen I could! But w'at's the hodds? They'll be shadowin' you anyw'eres. But per'aps you listen to an old 'gun-moll' naow, and see that you 'ave some friends 'andy—hif you go to Moreau's on Sixth Havenue! Fahncy! Suppose somebody 'ires a roughneck to start somethin' in the eatin'-place, an' you get beat up—or 'lagged.' Hi mean arrested. W'ere does the dame get off at?"

"That would be nasty," I admitted, and finished the dressing. "There, how does it feel?"

"Fine, thank you, Doctor. You tike a lot o' trouble with a fat old cripple. But I'm givin' it you stright. No stall! I'd not go to Moreau's unless I 'ad 'elp right at 'and," she said earnestly.

"Are you figuring on probabilities, or putting me wise to a real frame-up?" I asked. "I'd want to be sure, before I asked anybody to act as a body-guard. I'd look foolish if nothing happened."

"Aye! But you'd look a lot worse if it did! I know 'ow it's been with anybody that 'as befriended the gel. Tike my word f'r it, or you'll be sorry!"

Just then a trusty hospital-orderly came within ear-shot, and before I had a chance for another word with Aunt Mary in private, something else happened to set me thinking. I had just finished morning rounds on the male side, and Henry, the trusty German drug-orderly, had been more viciously sullen than ever because I had again cut down the amount of the whisky-requisition when I signed his list.

This had been the start of trouble once before—the time Wheeler had broke the German—and I did not look for mutiny on that issue again. But I had hardly finished Aunt Mary's dressing, and she still had more advice to give me, when there was a heavy knocking on the door that communicated with the men's ward through my office. Riley's head popped through when it opened and he called:

"Doctor, Walsh has kicked the stuffing out of Henry! Sorry to bother you, but the Dutchman's head is cut pretty bad, I guess!"

He was too familiar with such episodes to get excited, so not likely to exaggerate. As I passed him in the doorway I asked:

"What started it? I thought Henry was tamed for good."

"Sure—he's tamed so far's Wheeler's concerned; but Dan ain't here. I dunno how it happened—Walsh c'n tell you."

Riley followed me through the office, asking—

"Will I chuck Walsh in the clink?"

"Not any! I can't spare Walsh for a dark-cell, and he must have had a reason. Don't send for the Dep, either, until I find out what's doing!"

"Very well, sir!"

The mangled drug-orderly was on a cot, held there by two other orderlies in stripes, and he was almost as badly cut up as when Dan had done the job. He was quite as wildly terrified and acted like a man demented as he struggled and yelled:

"He kills me! He vill murserr me! *Lass' mich gehen!* He vill murrderr me already!"

"Men—to your beds!" I scattered the knot of convalescents. "Henry, shut up! I'll see you're not hurt any more. Put the screens 'round the bed, Riley, and fix the dressings while I scrub up!" I called Walsh to me at the set-bowls while I washed.

Digitized by Google

"What did you make trouble for just now, Walsh, just when I have troubles enough? You know I'm trying to get things in good shape here, so the warden won't have a chance to find fault when he comes back. Want to lose me my job?"

Walsh's pale sad face, with the innocent baby-blue eyes, became still more rueful. He was holding a pad to a cut on his cheek, and he whispered hoarse and wearily:

"Aw, Dutch gets gay wit' me over de whisky-requisition, same as he did wit' Dan, an' I smears him one fer luck. He comes back at me wit' a spud splitter—so I has to go to him right or get me guts ripped out. He ain't right in the belfry—that Dutch mutt. He's got bugs, Doc!"

"Let's see that cut!"

I stepped close, not to examine the wound, but because I saw Walsh had something to say in secret. While I made pretense of looking at the scratch, the faithful crook went on rapidly without lip-motion:

"Dere's hell to pay—slippin' somp'n over on yuh, Doc! I ain't wise to the frame-up, but Dutch's in it, f'r money. An' he's on to me like a wolf—pipes me ev'ry holy minnit, so I don't get a chanct to say a woid t'yuh! But I hears yuh say yuh wants t'put d'skids under 'im, an' get 'im out o' de awspittle, so I puts it over 'im. I get a stretch in de dark dis time all right, all right. Yonder comes de Dep!"

THE Dep's brow was thunderous, his voice frightsome, but his nigh eyelid twitched as he rasped:

"You're a sweet bunch up here—not! Walsh, you pie-faced roughneck, this makes twice you pull off a dog-fight in hospital. The Doc gets you off last time, and now you double-cross him. Well—what's the stall? Sling your bluff!"

"One moment, Mr. Murphy!" I drew him aside to gain time to think, and Walsh's words, "ain't right in the belfry" gave me an idea. "This really is a medical matter," said I seriously. "Henry has shown signs lately of not being right in his head—has the usual delusion that there's a conspiracy against him and thinks he's in constant danger. Today he attacked Walsh with a potato-knife he had secreted, and Walsh got cut in taking it away from him. Walsh may have been a little rough, but I need him in hospital."

"All right, Doc!" Murphy smiled wisely. "It goes if you say so. But when the old man gets back I look for doin's. Better put the Dutchman in 'isolated,' what?"

"It will save further trouble—his bit is done in a fortnight anyhow, so there's no use making out papers for Matteawan."

"Nah! They'd never get around to him, and he'd be wished off on us f'r a month more. Well, I leave it to you, Doc—" the Dep turned to the door—"but better muzzle your dog when Jas. G. hits the Island!" And he left the hospital in my hands entirely.

"Don't get in wrong with the new Warden on my account, Doc," Walsh hoarsely whispered as I passed him. "Dark-cell don't phase me a little bit!"

"And the new Warden don't phase me a little bit—not until he comes anyhow," I replied.

I fixed Henry up with the help of Riley, and found him practically insane with terror as a result of this second beating-up. He had to be watched by a special orderly to keep him from jumping out of bed in his paroxysms of fear, and as soon as he was out of danger from his wounds I had to put him in the isolated corridor to keep him from disturbing the other patients.

But it took time to get him sewed up and quieted, and when I had finished my other work and was free to go to town to Mary Lloyd it was mid-afternoon. I had kept in mind Aunt Mary's warning, however, and wanted to see Dan Wheeler about it. If I was to be shadowed by somebody looking for a chance to make trouble—perhaps to kidnap my lovely patient, or even worse—I needed Wheeler's advice. So in spite of his warning not to be seen with him too often, I went by way of Madison Square and up Broadway, where I knew he took his afternoon walk on his way to and from Sanders' Gymnasium.

Near Thirtieth Street I saw him coming, a strikingly handsome and well-groomed figure, in correct frock-coat and silk tile, and I knew his smooth athlete's stride at a distance. He looked straight over my shoulder with a slight head-shake as we passed, and though his thin lips never moved I heard clearly—

"Walk 'round the glock—slow!"

Substituting the guttural G—used by all ventriloquists because the labials make a visible lip-movement—for the letter B, I understood that I was to walk slowly around

Digitized by Google

the block. Also his caution was further proof that we were already shadowed. So I turned at the first corner and crossed to Fifth Avenue, made the circuit of the block and was headed north on Broadway again when I heard his elastic step behind me.

"Eyes in the boat!" came over my shoulder from the rear. "Don't turn a hair—the Dick's lost your scent, but he'll be on it again any minute. What is it?"

"I take Miss Lloyd to Moreau's after theater tonight," I said, keeping my face straight forward and watching out for possible eavesdroppers in the passing crowd; so that nobody could tell that we two were conscious of each other's presence. "Aunt Mary says I need a body-guard. What about it?"

"Forget it and tell Aunt Mary I'm on the job! Why didn't you show up at the gym this afternoon?"

"Walsh gave Henry another dose of the same, and it took two hours to put Henry together," I answered as briefly as he questioned.

"Not so loud! Keep Dutch in clink! Go to the gym and meet Sibley; but keep arms-length from Castleman and White—got that?"

Dan appeared to be in a hurry. I snapped:

"Yes! That all?"

"All but this: We don't speak as we pass for a spell, you and I, you been too fresh. See?"

The venom in his hissing whisper made me forget all caution and I drew away from him, at the same time turning to look in his face.

It was the face of a man dangerously angry and disgusted; but the narrowed greenish eyes glared straight ahead as he drew abreast and then passed me, never once giving a sign that I existed. I all but stopped, collided with a fat man who stepped on my feet and cursed me, and when I got my bearings again Dan was not in sight.

I was still walking on mechanically when a chunky, low-browed individual glided noiselessly past me, turning to slant up at me a glance of malicious triumph. Then he too disappeared in the thickening crowd, but I had a vivid picture of his brutal face, heavy jaw, cauliflower-ear and all—the face of a typical pug.

I never see a cauliflower-ear now that it does not give me a sinking feeling at the stomach, a reflex by association, a weak echo of the scare Dan gave me by that last whispered threat.

But the appearance of the ex-pugilist, probably now a cheap shadow hired to trail Dan, gave me a life-line suggestion. Wheeler must have been acting, feigning hostility for the benefit of the spy who was watching us, and who had shown plainly that he was deceived. If all our enemies were as easy as this thug we should win out in a walk. Anyhow, it was raw work to put such a man on the trail of the king of gamblers and high-class crooks—a man who would give away the game even to me.

Then came the answer Dan had given to my question about a body-guard for me, "I'm on the job!" That could mean only that he would see to it that Mary Lloyd was not left without a protector, even if I were attacked in the restaurant after the theater. So I hurried to Fifth Avenue in high feather.

This is no love-story, as I may have forgotten to state, but the man who could be near Mary Lloyd for hours on end without things happening inside him—I am sorry for him, that's all. And when you add to that the very plain delight she showed at my coming, the flashing brilliance of eyes such as you read about and see but once, the touch of a little velvet hand charged with something that shot warm and tingling to your very center, and that touch repeated—never mind! I will say right here that I do not remember one scene of the play we saw that night, while I can see just how Mary Lloyd looked in any one of a dozen positions, and a whiff of a certain faint perfume still brings my heart into a very dry throat. Those are bald facts.

MARY LLOYD, leaning across a small snowy table in Moreau's, head tilted forward and sidewise to look me steadily in the eyes, was a fact of another kind, mighty dangerous and sweet—sweet as her low, clear voice which was saying:

"This is a lovely place, James; a cosey, fascinating place—even if the things they serve turn out not the best. I'm already in love with these little connecting rooms!" She dimpled with enjoyment of the flush she had raised in my stupid face by her pause and tilted her head the other way.

Digitized by Google

"How did you find it? I believe you know the best of everything in New York, and I shall not be disappointed if this tomato bisque is tasteless—and it's a masterpiece!" she finished as she tasted.

"I know the man who composed it," said I. "He'd be ravished if he could hear you say that."

And mentally I added, "And *see* you taste it."

For I knew M. Vigny, the chef downstairs, having brought a note to him from his former employer, Dietmann, now my night orderly in the Pen hospital. In fact, M. Vigny was the reason we had come here. He was at that moment making for us an inspired poem in his shining laboratory, and I was thinking it might be the right thing to have him up to be complimented on his genius. I had read of such things being done somewhere.

But just then I saw all happiness leave the brilliant face before me. A painful flush flooded from neck to brow and the heavy lashes dropped their dark screen. It was like a sudden eclipse of noon sunlight. Mary threw up at me one wretched look as she murmured:

"Don't look around, James! There's a man—three men in the other room."

Already I was looking at a mirror behind and above her on the wall. It showed the open door and through it three men at table, one of them staring at her with more than insolence.

She had not finished speaking when I found myself on my feet, napkin clenched in hand, with a roaring in my ears. Like the fool I was, I went through that door, closed it behind me and said to the man who was staring:

"You are annoying the girl I am with. Stop staring at her!"

He was a sleek cynical New Yorker, with a nasty smile. With barely a glance of contempt at me he spoke to the man at the head of the table.

"Who left the bars down? *That* anything you ever saw?" And he tilted his head my way with a sneer.

Slowly raising his eyes from the bill-of-fare in his hand, the man addressed looked me over, returned to his order-card as he answered—

"I think not."

It was a soft,whispery voice with a snaky buzz in it. Even in my anger this man fascinated me on the spot. I stared down at the cold still face. For all its sensuality, it was fearlessly strong; in spite of the small features it was vital, vivid—a face to attract or repel at will. All this I got in a second, as the hissing voice repeated—

"I think not."

"Then it's your meat, Cropsey!" growled the first man to the third, opposite him. "Throw it into the street!"

As he spoke to this third member of the party, a hired thug in a cheap dress-suit, I saw out of the corner of my eyes that he was the bruiser who had shadowed Dan on the street, thick ear and all. He got up, kicked back his chair and came at me.

Although I don't lay claim to being a man-eater, I had then had enough boxing and street-fighting experience to deceive an opponent by instinct. At the moment I felt my danger and the girl's, my muscles sprang taut and my senses alert; yet I held the same pose and seemed stupidly to stare at the man of the snake-face, while I clenched my fist at my side and measured my distance to the heavy jaw of the hired bully.

Seeing me absorbed and off my guard, he came at me hands-down and all open, and when he was within distance I swung—and swung hard. It was a good drive, I must say it, and it landed full and fair with a crunching smack that was music. He was a soggy chap, but he left his feet and landed crashingly on the overturned chair. He stayed there.

THERE was an instant of stillness, then many things happened in a rush. Men jammed the door of the main dining-room. I saw a policeman elbowing and threatening his way through the crowd; saw him stop and turn toward the door that led from the main room to the room where I had left Mary alone. A row was in progress at that door; I could hear the scuffling, and I had sense enough to take the short-cut through the door at my back, to get to the girl.

She was still at the table—standing and staring at the fracas, for another lively mix-up was going on just outside the door to the dining-room proper.

As I entered the little room I saw White—towering a giant above the mass—pluck a man from the jam in the door, lift him bodily and pitch him back over his shoulder into the crowd. White had not taken a

Digitized by Google

step into the room, however, when the officer caught his arm and threatened him with his revolver-butt.

"Don't hit him, White!" I shouted just in time. "Don't resist an officer!"

With a quick look at me, White drew back from the door and at the same time thrust Castleman through it, then submitted to be drawn aside by the "bull."

Somebody closed the door, and the uproar ceased as suddenly as it had begun.

Afterward I learned that White and Castleman had been in the big room just outside the door ever since Mary Lloyd and I had come in, without once peeping in to see who the girl was. When I had blundered into trouble in the second small room, two men in the dining-room had darted at the door—no doubt at a signal—to get the defenseless girl. It was then that White had manhandled both of them as I had seen him do one.

Both disappeared, and I never knew how much of a plot had been formed, or whether its purpose had been to kidnap Mary Lloyd. For at the time I was too confused and excited to understand what it all was about.

For there, in that little room, was a tableau. Castleman and Mary Lloyd stood staring at each other across the little table. Both were pale; eyes wide and frightened. Neither one spoke.

"Miss Lloyd," I stammered, "you—let me introduce Mr. Castleman of Kentucky."

"I think I have met Mr. Castleman," she said low and gravely.

"Won't you—why not sit down—and join us?" I was more embarrassed than Castleman, and that is saying much; but he answered her clearly, with never a look at me:

"We met at White Sulphur—two years ago. I have not forgotten."

Then, as she colored in distressful memory of what had happened in those two years, he turned to me tactfully.

"I expect, seh, we shall not be permitted to sit down—here!"

And with his words enter Trouble in the person of another officer, followed by the first with White in custody. The insolent man who had done the staring came to the front.

"Run 'em all in, officer — I'll appear against 'em! That's the jay that did the slugging with no provocation!" He pointed to me. "He'll wear stripes, or I'll know——"

"One moment, Morton."

It was the soft voice of the snake-like man, and there was sudden silence. Showing his small white teeth in a startling smile —a smile at once attractive and dangerous —this man said easily:

"There may be a mistake here. My friend, Mr. Wheeler, says he knows these gentlemen, or some of them. Is that correct, Mr. Wheeler?"

With delight I saw Dan enter at the question, coolly masterful as usual, but he showed no sign of seeing me. Instead, he pointed to White and Castleman.

"These two are friends of mine. The other—" he waved me away with a turn of his graceful hand as he finished—"used to be!" To the officer who had White in charge he added: "I'll answer for them, Sullivan. Well?"

"Certainly, Mr. Wheeler!" The policeman even saluted as he let go White's sleeve, then laid a heavy hand on my shoulder. "But you'll come and tell the man at the desk——"

"One moment, officer!" Again the soft voice, and the smile that showed the little even teeth. "If this third gentleman is a friend of Mr. Wheeler's friends, I will go bail for him myself on the strength of that. As a favor to me, Morton, will you drop the charge, *in toto?*"

Although he asked it as a favor, he still smiled, and the insolent man he addressed as Morton caved in at the sight of those small very even teeth.

"Oh, sure! Anything you say, Mr. Sibley." And he turned to the officer whose hand still rested on my shoulder. "You know Mr. Sibley!" he blustered. "Mr. Clark Sibley! You heard what he said—take your hand off the man!"

"I beg pardon!" mumbled the arm of the law. "I never met Mr. Sibley, but I suppose it will be all right."

"You suppose!" Morton barked. "You know he could break the man who can break you! If you muff this throw you will get yours. On your way, you——"

"No cause for excitement." The cold whisper stopped the blusterer, and Sibley said to the officer: "You are only doing your duty. But in this case let's temper it with mercy—" deftly he slipped something into the copper's big hand—"and something else that *doesn't* fall 'like gentle dew from heaven.' Well? And now we'll

Digitized by Google

shake hands all 'round and make our bows as prettily as we know how."

Now, seeing that the crowd had been thoughtfully shut out, the policemen became as clay in Sibley's skilful hands. Both bluecoats made their exit, while mutual introductions were in progress in the little room, and the man Morton quickly followed them. White was the one who introduced me to Clark Sibley.

"Dr. Corbin, shake hands with Mr. Clark Sibley. It ought to be inside the ropes. I'd like to see a few rounds between you two. Doc, Sibley's a wonder with the mitts!"

"I don't doubt it," I said to be polite, but I had not noticed that the man had the build of an athlete—so striking was his face and his manner.

"Very nice of you," Sibley smiled. "We shall meet again. Soon, I hope. Good night. I must keep in sight of Dan Wheeler. Good night, gentlemen."

He bowed with perfect grace and was gone.

IN THE little room remained only Mary Lloyd, Castleman, White and I. Castleman, having led Mary to a seat at our table, sat across from her and saw only her in the whole universe.

While Sibley was in the room she had seemed stunned—and, by the way, I could not but admire the tact with which he kept his eyes from her and took himself out of the way—then she flashed brilliantly alive in an instant as I brought White to introduce him. We four finished supper together, and I never saw her more bewildering. She kept us on our toes all the time.

This was Castleman's second meeting with her, and it followed as the sparks fly upward that he fell more hopelessly in love—he was no earthly use. White, outspokenly swept off his feet, was more articulate and entertaining. He talked of the cow-country with a big simplicity that swept that little room with the wind of wide spaces, the while he seemed to wrap her around with a gentle tenderness as warm as it was reverently admiring.

"I should think you'd want to get back to it!" She looked into his eyes thoughtfully. "Don't you hate New York, and its dirt?"

"I did, until fifteen minutes ago. Yes ma'am—I couldn't be hired to leave right now." He spoke with the simple directness of a child.

"But you'd shake the city dust from your feet and buy your ticket for Denver tomorrow morning," she answered as simply.

"No, ma'am! Not unless I can buy tickets for two—can I? I got a gentle hoss I'd like to put you on. And I know a spot on the Grand Cañon of the Colorado where I'll show you how the sun goes down, out West!"

He finished almost in a whisper, but with a deep organ-tone sounding from his spacious chest. He had no thought of irreverence, and the girl felt the depth of the tribute. Her eyes fell as she said softly—

"Thank you!"

"Mr. White—" the Kentuckian's eyes glowed in his pale, fine face as he raised his glass to the big Westerner—"my hat is off to you, seh!"

Under this warmth and chivalrous admiration the girl blossomed into a something too fine for my dull words. She told us at her door, where we all three escorted her, she had not been so happy for years. We said our good nights, both White and Castleman in high feather because they had permission to call, and were leaving when she said:

"Excuse me, gentlemen, but I want a word with my physician. Won't you come in and wait?"

"Thanks! But I got to have room right now," answered White. "All out-doors is just my size tonight. We'll wait outside. Take your time, Doc!"

So my two body-guards did sentry duty while I faced Mary Lloyd in the dim and spacious hall.

"James—" she turned up eyes full of trouble to sound mine—"don't let that man get a hold on you. You see he can do with people what he will. Don't let him—make you think I am—what I am not!" Her sweet voice trembled.

"Mary Lloyd," said I solemnly, "Clark Sibley is a dangerous man—any one can see that—but I'd not advise Mr. Sibley to say a word against you, to me. I think he will see. himself, that he'd better not!"

"James—" she came nearer—"you will come to see me just the same—tomorrow?"

"Yes—a little later—I am going to Sanders' gym, first."

"You will meet that man there." Her eyes clouded and she spoke hopelessly. "He will get you—he does every man. Nobody can stop him or turn him. But promise that

Digitized by Google

you will come here just the same, please."

"I promise."

"One more thing. Don't let him get you alone, anywhere. I know it sounds silly, but promise me that, too!"

"I promise," I repeated gravely.

"Then—" she looked in my eyes long and intently, until I got red, before she went on slowly—"then I suppose you can—go."

She went to the door and let me out herself; held my hand in both hers as she bade me a soft—

"Good night—and good luck!"

My double body-guard I found pacing the sidewalk in an uplifted trance, and they greeted me with a duet of enthusiastic thanks.

"We are your servants, seh, from this time on," said Castleman.

"And we don't take chances on anything happening to you," White added. "We see you safe aboard your boat—Wheeler or no Wheeler!"

"I reckon Wheeler told us to be at Moreau's just for that purpose," Castleman suggested. "But what did he mean by turning you down cold this evenin'? I didn't like that a little bit."

"Just forget it," said I. "He had a reason. I have been there before, and I have found things worked out all right. But there's no sense in your going with me to Fifty-second Street. I think the rough-house proceedings are over for tonight, at least."

"Bet you a nickel on it!" said White cheerfully. "Or I'll go you any amount you don't get past the corner of First Avenue and Fifty-second without trouble. You made an enemy tonight, son!"

"You're too sure and too definite," said I. "Where did you get your tip, and whom do you mean—Sibley?"

"Not for a minute! Sibley's all right," White warmly denied. "He's the man that gave me the tip. See me tear up a paper at the table, and burn it in the ash-tray? Well, that was a note from Sibley the waiter slipped me just after Sibley left. It said, 'See the Doctor safe to the Island, and burn this.' I rise to remark this Sibley person behaved like one white man this night—no?"

"He certainly seems to have influence," I admitted. "And he saved me a run-in by the constabulary, if nothing more—and I never thanked him! I must say he gives me the creeps, somehow."

"You'll get over that—I felt it at first," said Castleman.

As he spoke I recalled Wheeler's similar prophecy, "You'll change your mind about him."

"He certainly entertains like a gentleman," the Kentuckian continued. "He is the first New Yorker who has made me feel at home."

"Same here!" White chimed in. "And he'll present you with Manhattan Island on a gold platter if you say the word—ain't afraid to part with his cash, not any. And talking about afraid—say! That same Mr. Sibley is some cool and comfortable person—talks right out in meetin', yes ma'am! He says he hopes to meet up with this Crimson Chamber Wizz—the man all the 'plutes' are scared to mention—says he wants it advertised that he's on the trail of the Main Guy of that bunch, and that he will wind him up inside a fortnight or New York will never see Clark Sibley again! He said it easy, too—never raised his voice above a whisper, or twisted his neck to see who was rubberin'. He sort o' gets me, this Sibley person."

"What else did he say?" I couldn't help being interested, but I added, "Any man can talk."

"Not about some things he talks about." White looked at the Kentuckian. "That right, Cunnel?"

"He talked about some things that gave me a sensation, yes seh!" gravely admitted the Kentuckian. "And I'd not want to say what he said—about a certain secret order, for instance. He said he expected to investigate that after he'd stopped the Crimson Chamber conspiracy."

"Whee!" I whistled. "He's either mighty brave or foolish. Did he say he'd stop the secret order? What did he call it? Did he imply that it was a hoax—a fake?"

"That's just it," White returned in a whisper. "He said he knew it was immensely rich and powerful, and he'd never found any man that knew even the name of it, or a man to admit that he belonged to it. What was it he said at the end, Castleman?"

"He said: 'It's the biggest flimflam of the age,' the Kentuckian's low voice repeated, 'or the inside power that makes history. In either case I shall get in, or be put out—for good! Meanwhile let them stop me if they can.' He never raised his voice, but I can swear he meant it," Castleman

Digitized by Google

added thoughtfully. "It sure gave me a mighty queer sensation to see and hear him. I'd not like to have that man on my trail; there would be just the one thing to do —you'd have to kill him, and kill him quick!"

"Cor-rect!" White said loudly. "And I'd rather let out the job, at that!" Straightening his six feet of man, the Westerner filled his chest and let out a cyclonic:

"*Whoosh!* Let's get off the subject of plots and dark doin's, for a spell anyhow. Say, Doc, I saw a picture of Miss Mary Lloyd two years ago; knew it was a lie the minute I saw it, and always stuck to it no girl could look like that—just couldn't be, y'know! And tonight I——"

He stopped to wave a hopeless hand over his head, then halted me on a lighted corner and caught me by the coat-lapels.

"Now, Doc," he began with solemn deliberation, "as man to man. Did I see—a real live girl, tonight, and will I see her again, or a girl one-tenth as hard to believe, or will I—wake up?" He swayed me back and forth. "Can you swear to her? How long have you known her and kept it up your sleeve?"

"Since I was a kid. Every Summer she lived where I was raised. That's the kind we have up in Vermont—once a century. I shall miss that boat—let me go!" I freed myself. "Wait and see! Ask her—tomorrow. Good night. This is the corner I couldn't pass without being sandbagged! You're a flivver; so-long!"

"No you don't—come on Cunnel! It'll be the next dark corner. You seem to be the hero of the piece, Doc, the way they're layin' for you; and it's our job to do the rescue-act, trouble or no trouble, or we don't draw any pay."

Both men were walking with me down the long, dark crosstown block between the corner drug-store and the river. While White was speaking I noticed for the first time that there was no light between that from the drug-store window and a dimly sputtering arc-light at the head of the stairs that led down to the float on the river-front. Some one had put out the other electric, half-way down, and I was not sorry that they both stayed with me. For I had been followed on this same dark stretch once before, and after nine o'clock I always walked it in the middle of the street.

I now recalled that this same arc-light had been put out on that other occasion, when I had narrowly escaped being garroted. I took an arm of each as I said—

"Well then, if you must have trouble, come out in the open where we can see it coming." And I pulled them into the middle of the street.

"When it comes, here's hopin' it's man-size," said White. "I had too much of these ructions that promise well and fizzle out. I need exercise, myself!"

"WHAT'S yondeh—in the shade o' that stagin' where they're buildin'?" Castleman became Southern in speech under excitement. He pointed to a house being repaired just ahead of us, and I thought I could see dark figures moving stealthily in the deep shadow. Before we had spoken another word a woman's shriek split the stillness. Again and again it sounded, followed by a shrill:

"Help! Help! Murder!"

The cry came from an unoccupied house a little in our rear.

"Oh, no! Not any," said White in an interval of silence. "That's too easy; doesn't fool even a roughneck like me. It's a trap to split us up, so let's don't!"

"Maybe," Castleman answered quickly, "but it's a woman! Can't take any chances. Stay here while I see!"

He sprinted in the direction of the renewed screams, now muffled as if by a gag.

"Don't follow far!" I shouted after him. "Yell if you want us!"

"Better go with him anyhow—keep together!"

White was cool and steady as usual, and started as he spoke. Before he had taken two jumps after the sprinting Kentuckian, and just as I moved to follow, a blinding glare flashed in our faces.

"Hands up—quick!" a rough voice barked at us, and two gleaming revolvers appeared just below the dazzling beam from the pocket flash-light, both held on us level and steady.

White's hands went up with the words, and he answered cheerily:

"All right, neighbor! A pair of bullets is good. The pot's yours—go to it!"

"You're no fool!" growled a hoarse voice, purposely made hoarser. "There's two more just like 'em behind yuh, so don't get gay wit' us! But y're in wrong. We ain't goin' to frisk yuh; keep y'r leather in y'r

Digitized by Google

kick, an' listen good an' hard. Keep away from the dame on the avenyoo—all you guys—'r yuh get yours good an' plenty! Are yuh wise? Hep there, yuh pill-pedler! Keep y'r lamps this way 'r get drilled!"

I was slowly twisting my neck to see if there were really two more yeggs in our rear. But at the sharp bark of the spokesman, emphasized by the back-click of his double-action Colt, I whipped my head to the front and held my hands higher. Both barrels flashed in the light as they were trained on my stomach. I felt them both, right where they pointed, and they didn't feel a bit good. I fervently hoped the guns were in steady hands, for the slightest finger-twitch meant a hole in me. The heavy voice started up again.

"Now then! Are yuh next? Keep——"

But it went no further. Swift-padding steps sounded, front and rear, and White leaped sidewise out of range as he saw the gun-barrels waver. Then he lunged at the dark figures back of them.

The light went out. In the moment of black blindness that followed I heard scuffling gasps, grunted oaths and running rubber-soled steps that became fainter in the distance. There was one muffled crack of a revolver, then silence.

As my sight came back slowly, I saw White lying almost at my feet. I bent over him just as he moved and sat up, rubbing his head.

"Some handy with a gun—both ends—that lad," he observed ruefully. "And here's where we score another fizzle. Which way'd they go? And where's the Cunnel?"

"He ain't hurt—back in a minute!"

A hoarse voice, much like the one we had heard before, made us both jump. From the dark basement-entrance close at hand came a masked man.

"Forgot me, Doc?" he asked. "Remember McBride, an' the night the Dutchman took poison?"

"Sure! How are you, McBride?" I shook hands with my former hospital-orderly. "Were you the hold-up artist that cracked this gentleman's nut? Mr. White, this is Mr. McBride, a square man if there ever was one."

"Glad to know Mr. White," McBride said as they shook. "Hope I didn't hit too hard. I can generally tell by the looks how thick a man's nut is, and do it about right; but I had to hurry this time."

"Don't apologize—it was a smooth job," said White. "What's it all about, anyhow?"

"Here's your friend," said McBride.

Castleman came on the run, panting:

"*Whoosh!* Gentlemen—gentle—*men!* It cert'nly was a fake. Chased two men—they were draggin' a woman between 'em. Up comes another man—they drop the woman and vanish—all three. I pick up the—the straw woman—she was stuffed—a dummy!" He wiped his brow as he got his breath. "I was easy—but I see you're—hello! Who ——"

He saw the man in the basement-entrance for the first time.

"Say," McBride hurriedly interrupted, casting fearful eyes about, "I got to get off my spiel and hit the high-spots. If they lamp me rattlin' with you, Doc, it's my finish—that's no lie! I takes the job shadowin' you so's I c'n see you gets off easy. Besides, say, whoever is the Main Guy o' this push, the man that's hirin' me. He's got Carnegie lookin' like a piker. I drag down a cold century, just for this job—on the level! And that ain't all."

With another look around he beckoned us together and whispered:

"If you don't show up on Fifth Av' again f'r two weeks, me and two others was to split a thou' three ways. So it's a pipe you're in the way of somethin' with real money in it, Doc—what? Get me? Wait—this'll knock your eye out.

"Tonight I gets another offer. A real swell comes and doubles the figure—slips me the kale on the spot—to frame up and pull off this rescue stunt we just finished. Ever see such luck? It ain't healthy. I got cold feet, right now. Tomorrow I fade. But I had to put you next before I pulled my freight. You give us a square deal, or a little better, on the Island, Doc, and—well, that's all I know."

He was fairly shaking with fear and a desire to run.

"Thank you, McBride! But why do you leave New York?" I asked. "There must be more easy money where that came from."

"It's too easy, Doc. I don't like it. I know a yegg that got a soft grift like this, with no questions asked, and he turned up missin'. No, it's——"

He seemed about to run, and I grasped his arm as I shot the question—

Digitized by Google

"But do you know who is after us—or who it was that framed the rescue?"

"Not one thing, Doc, hope-to-die! That's one thing—then it's too big! When big money goes on the loose, a crook like me don't count f'r much. They'd croak me in a holy minute if they piped me in this bunch. Lemme go! You got it all, Doc, all I know!" He pulled back into the dark shadow of a basement-entrance, but I held his sleeve for one more question.

"Tell me this: Who is it that is persecuting Miss Lloyd? Who told you to bluff us out of going to her house? And what were you instructed to do to us tonight?"

"Beat you up, Doc," he whispered rapidly. "Trim you so you'd keep away from the dame a week or so, anyway. But I don't know who's got it in for her—don't know a thing. And I wouldn't dare tell you if I did!"

"Is Dan Wheeler the man who framed the rescue?"

I plumped the name—the talisman of terror for all crooks—at him suddenly in the hope of jarring out of him a fact or two. I could feel him shrink, and he gasped:

"No! And that's why I tipped you off—it's bein' spread all over that you got in wrong with Dan. And if I was you I'd do what I'm doin'—hike! Now I done it—lemme loose!"

He jerked free and darted under the front steps. The basement door slammed, echoing through the empty house, and we three were left to stare at one another in the dark.

"Looks like a spell o' weather," White commented cheerfully. "And it sticks right out that we're due to be the storm-center—Miss Lloyd and we three. Well, gentlemen, what's the sense of the meetin'? Do we all hunt for a cyclone-cellar and leave her to be——"

"Ten regiments couldn't scare you out! You know that we know it." Castleman slapped the Westerner's broad shoulder. "Now you have been bluffed, you will stick to the last gasp; and I reckon we stay together on this. Well—" he turned to me—"what do you think of your friend Wheeler now, Doctor?"

"All my money—all I hope to have—on Dan Wheeler," I said. "I know Dan, you see. And what's more, I am going to go to Clark Sibley tomorrow and put it to him straight. If he has such a pull he can stop some of this yegg-work, and I shall ask him to do it."

"Don't spoil all the fun, Doc. What'll we do for exercise if we don't have any more surprise-parties?" White objected. "And I was hopin' we'd be in one scrap to a finish—I do hate meddlin' and mystery!"

"Do your scrapping with the mitts, at the gym," I suggested. "I'll take you on for a round or two tomorrow. And we got to save ourselves to help the girl, to say nothing of the sleuth-work ahead of us. Money is no object to you two plutes, but I haven't forgotten that we cop much coin if we land the 'Demon Unknown,' and I need it in my business!"

"Plute—I wot not!" said Castleman. "The wheel must behave better to me ward, or I walk the ties to Louisville. Me for both the girl and the *geld*—to a finish!"

Although he aired his new crook-slang, he was in solemn earnest, and his fine face hardened as he stared ahead with the cold-steel glitter in his eyes. We had come to the foot of the street now where an arc-light sputtered at the head of the landing-stairs. As we said good night we shook hands on a silent pact to see the thing through, whatever it might prove to be, and by this time we were all satisfied that it was, as McBride put it, "something big."

VII

THE two weeks that followed must be summed up in few words. Although they made up the richest fortnight of all my twenty-odd years, it would fill a book-shelf to chronicle them.

The day after the meeting in Moreau's eating-place I went to begin my work at Sanders' gym and to keep my appointment with White for a bout with the gloves. But "Jem" Taylor, the master of arms and trainer, boxing instructor and British ex-champ middleweight—likewise my old teacher in sparring and broadsword—not only gave me a real welcome, but vetoed the boxing-bout.

"Can't 'ave it! I've 'ad the gloves on with both of you gentlemen, and you're both 'ard-'itters. It's bound to be a swift go w'en you come together, and you're not in condition. As your atheletic adviser I couldn't allow it—a chahnce blow might put eyether one of you out, and it'd not be sportsmanlike. Doctor, you're not 'ardened

Digitized by Google

and in trainin' like Mr. White, and it'd not be fair to you to stack you up against him for at least a fortnight."

"But White is spoiling for a bit of fun, and I volunteered to give him some exercise," I protested. "I've been put to sleep before, and it does me good."

"No you don't—unless you're a better sprinter than I am!" White showed well-feigned terror. "I've heard 'em talk that way before, and it always meant a gilt-edged trimmin' for Bobbie! My mama wants me, now!"

"Then it's all off—one afraid and the other dassent," said I. "But it's a pity."

"Perhaps I might act as understudy for a punching-bag."

A soft, whispery voice made me shiver and turn around to see Sibley coming out of the locker-room just behind us. In tights and sweater he was a sight worth seeing, not the Greek-gladiator type, but with fine-fibered long-bellied muscles that played under translucent satin with a flowing, smooth action mighty deceptive to a tyro. I could see just how easily and gracefully he would slip in a knockout while you were thinking it was a pity to hit him—I had been there myself—and I wanted to warn White to keep out of reach until he had his man's measure. But I had no chance, for the big Westerner was already off to his locker to strip. Taylor went to get his stop-watch, and I was alone with Sibley.

Although our acquaintance was not a day old, and in spite of the unpleasant sensation the man's personality gave me, I couldn't believe such an athlete all rotten inside, and I seized the opportunity to try him out. The vital importance of my subject made any conventional scruples absurd, and I recalled that Sibley was notably outspoken as I said—

"Mr. Sibley, among the many things I have heard about you is the rumor that you have much influence and more—courage."

"Why the pause?" he asked coolly, turning on me his strangely still and close-set gray-green eyes.

"Because I hesitated whether to use such words as fearlessness or recklessness," I answered truthfully.

"Then I should say, since you used the more flattering term, that you have a favor to ask—" he was still boring into me with that passionless gaze—"and I think I can come close to the nature of it!"

"I have a favor to ask." I did well not to flush, I thought, and it gave me confidence. "Miss Lloyd is—is in trouble—has already suffered enough, as you must know. Now if——"

"If I am truly brave—" he took my words in advance, speaking in the hollow monotone of a sleep-walker, making me feel as if my subconscious self were dragged out of me by his uncanny eyes and were speaking through him—"I will stop this persecution." Suddenly changing his tone, he said briskly: "Now, Doctor, you mix your terms. You confuse courage with the attribute of the popular hero. A fearless man will do what he pleases, whether it fits with somebody else's notion of what a brave man would do or not. I think 'fearless' was the better word, after all."

"Then you refuse my——"

"I refuse you nothing!" he snapped, and the small white teeth showed, glistening and even.

"Do you ask me to stop annoying Miss Lloyd? For I see you still think I am at the bottom of her troubles."

"Now you're wrong!" said I, for I was half convinced Mary Lloyd was mistaken in this. "I have been assured repeatedly that you're not the man behind it, but that you have the power to stop it. That's why I asked you——"

"That's why you intended to ask me if I were the man, but changed your—your mind. But let it go! Say it straight out. What do you want?"

"I want this dirty work stopped, so that we——"

"I will stop it. What else?" he interrupted me again.

"I want to know who is doing it, and why, and if it is the same man or men who run the Crimson Chamber game," I shot out in exasperation.

"Then you want what we all want, and we ought to be friends." Again the little teeth glistened. "Oughtn't we, Wheeler?"

"I pick my own friends," Wheeler answered dryly. He was within three feet of me, having entered from the bowling-alley where the crashing of the balls had covered his steps.

With no look my way, he now went into the dressing-rooms, adding—

"And I drop 'em only for good reasons."

"You can't drive him—" Sibley still smiled at me—"but he plays square and

Digitized by Google

keeps his word—there are few of them left!"

He looked thoughtfully after Dan's disappearing form, then turned to me to say hurriedly:

"You'd be a power, if it didn't take you so long to get started. I do what you ask because you ask it—for no other reason. Now come and referee this mill between White and me. How long shall I make it, three rounds or four?" And his smile this time didn't make me shiver.

"Why string it out?" I answered. "End it in one."

I intended to be pleasant and funny just as White appeared in his new "monkey clothes," as he called his red Jersey and white running-drawers. He was the typical athlete, a model for a Laocoon, with a splendid curly head, well set on his broad, muscular shoulders.

Taylor followed him and we went at once to the room used for sparring, fencing and such like. Wheeler came out of the locker-room, in white sweater and ordinary trousers. As we passed the door Sibley hailed him familiarly.

"Hello! You're made up right for a second in a prize-fight. Get your bottle and towel! I want you in my corner."

"And here comes my man," White called to Castleman, who entered from the street at the moment. "Come, Cunnel! Get your smelling-salts and a set of splints, and a first-aid outfit, and call an ambulance! I want you to write home and break it to the folks that little Bobbie's gone to rest."

"You will only sleep half a minute." Sibley flashed his teeth and looked at Wheeler whose stern, powerful face was set like marble and gave no sign.

And it was the weight of the famous man-killer's stern presence that pressed on us all, in spite of the cheerful mood of the two principals, and made us all more subdued as we entered the sparring-room together. Except for the ropes, all preparations were made as for a finish-fight. Taylor held the watch, the seconds felt of the gloves and put them on their men.

"Announce the rules, Doctor!" Sibley called over Wheeler's shoulder as he held out his hands to be clothed by the great cracksman-gambler. "Make 'em what you please."

"All right!" I called out. "Three-minute rounds—one minute between. No hitting in clinches or until your man is on both feet. You will break away at the word or lose on a foul—also a blow after time is called will be a foul at the discretion of the referee. Otherwise, Queensbury rules!"

Somehow I was more excited that I had ever been with gloves on my own hands, when I stepped to one side and called—

"Time!"

WHITE came to the center briskly; Sibley with a feline gliding step. They clapped gloves, stepped back and circled smoothly with a left side-step, looking for an opening.

It was impossible not to admire Sibley, even in half-action. He moved so easily on a perfect balance—loose and relaxed in every agile limb—and seemed to relish the feel of his muscles as they played without effort under the silky skin. He was enjoying himself, not with the savage warrior's tense fierceness, but with the released, free delight of the boy out of school. For all that, I watched him with suspense—with a curious dread—as he glided and circled just out of reach. He was dangerous—bad!

My eyes were drawn from him by a feeling that Wheeler was looking at me, and a quick glance at the dread manhandler showed his face, coldly cruel, thin lips a bit a-curl and long green eyes fixed on me, narrowed to a flaring slit. With a start I shot my look back to the boxers just in time, as a short *sst!* seemed to come from Wheeler's corner.

White on the instant launched a tremendous blow, half swing, half uppercut, at his opponent, now crouching head forward and hands down. It was a young knockout, sure.

Then, *chuck!* The big Westerner's head whipped back, his body and legs wilted as they fell backward and flopped heavily to the floor, and he lay straight and very flat, arms out like a cross, upturned face white and peaceful with its closed eyes; and from the lips, parted as in sweet sleep, trickled a thin streak of crimson, like a red worm crawling down his pale cheek.

Only as I stepped forward did I realize that Sibley had clipped straight, like a released spring, with speed that left the sight behind, shot his left to the lower face, landing his first and only knock-out smash while White's blow was dying at its birth.

There was not even a gasp of surprise. No man of us was set for anything to

Digitized by Google

happen. Sibley was the first to speak and break the five seconds' stillness that followed the smash and the fall. His low, whispery tones stirred me to action.

"I think he is out, Doctor. Perhaps I hit too hard, but it's difficult to gauge your drive when your man is coming."

He stood looking down at White calmly.

"He'll wake up in a minute!" Wheeler's resonant tones put life in us all as he stepped up to Sibley with: "Here! Hold out your hands!" And he untied the lacing-strings at the wrists.

"A lit-tle water in 'is face, Mr. Castleman—'e'll be right as rain ahfter a bit!" The grizzled old English ring-general pocketed his watch and took command, commenting as he kneeled beside the unconscious man: "My word! Hit wos a sleepwallop, that blaow! In a friendly baout, too, and awn a cold stomach, as you might siy. It's my wiy t' teach my boys t' warm up a bit before they go ahfter their man so 'ard, 'specially in a gentlemanly baout between friends!"

"What's that?" Sibley, looking on coolly, snapped the old fighter up. "Please remember I am not a pupil of yours, just now. I asked for no criticisms or reproofs—from anybody, not even from a gentleman!"

He held the same pose, pale-gray eyes narrow, and mouth quirked with contempt.

Seeing White's eyes open, the middle-aged ex-champion rose with some stiffness of the knees and much more of the neck, faced Sibley steadily and answered:

"I lay no claim to bein' a gentleman, sir. I'm naught but a professional fighteh, and a trainer, Mr. Sibley. But I was a man before I was a fighter—and a man 'as a right to speak out w'at 'e thinks, any place and any time!"

There was a simple dignity about the old oak-heart that won us all. Even Sibley suddenly flashed his brilliant ivory smile and held out a hand with his peculiar smooth quickness of movement and exclaimed:

"So you have, Mr. Taylor! I beg your pardon. Shake hands to show you forgive a flash of fool temper!"

With the same smile the strange man turned to help me lift White to his feet, saying:

"But it is you, Mr. White, I want to ask to forgive me. It was not a sportsmanlike thing to do—a chance blow anyhow—and another time you will——"

"It was a pippin!" White's first words came out clear and loud as he shook himself like a big dog just out of water. "I was trying to put over the mate to it when you put me to sleep. I want to shake hands, too. I will fight for a man with a punch like that—at the drop of a hat! But as the boy said, 'There ain't goin' to be no other time!' I been honin' for a finish-fight for quite some spell. I got it—got it quick—and I got a great plenty, thanks!"

And his big warm smile seemed to fill the bare room with cheer.

In the general relief and letting down of unpleasant tension, we all shared except Castleman and Dan Wheeler. Both those men seemed to be studying Sibley soberly, with faces much alike in expression, but after a while Wheeler turned away with the gruff comment:

"A great holler over a biff in the jaw! Come on, Taylor, get the foils. I'm going to count all your vest buttons this afternoon!"

And the two older men went off to their private fencing bout; yet Castleman was still looking at Sibley.

Some hour and a half later, when I had taken my exercise and shower and was leaving the gym, Castleman overtook me on my way to Fifth Avenue. After walking by my side in silence for half a block he broke out:

"Doctor, I believe I told you I had seen nothin' about Mr. Sibley to make me think he was not a gentleman. I have now, seh! He is smooth, mighty smooth, that man Sibley, but I'll sweah on a stack o' Bibles—that—man—comes—o' common stock, seh—very common!"

As he brought this fearful accusation with emphasis that brought his South-talk on top, he looked Colonel Carterish to an extent that justified White's name for him. I knew from his set lips he would not alter his feeling toward Sibley though the world caved in.

"I spoke to him before you came," I began, "about stopping the persecution of Miss Lloyd. He said he'd put an end to it—not that he'd try to stop it, but that he would stop it!"

"Then he admitted that he was the man who has been behind all this devilment."

The words came cold and clear. I looked around at his set profile and far-staring eyes. He went on—

Digitized by Google

"Of course he's got to be shot, and I claim first chance."

"Man, have some sense!" I urged. "He'd be a fool to talk like that if he were guilty! It's the surest proof he's not. Wheeler said I'd change my mind about him. Wheeler must know what he's talking about, and I certainly have found out some things, myself. I have changed my mind, as he said I would. Sibley is bigger than I thought. He behaved rather well this afternoon too, and, like White, I like a man with a punch. Mr. Sibley is some hard-hitter!"

But it was "red-gum 'gainst thunder," as he himself would say, to turn him from his purpose to challenge Sibley—call him out that very night. All the way up the avenue I debated with him on this question that belonged back in the age of King Arthur, and in the end I won. He would wait for more evidence before calling his man out. Meanwhile I knew he would treat Sibley with frigid courtesy. As for me, I could only think Mary Lloyd's fear of Sibley a mistaken obsession, not unnatural.

THERE followed two weeks of peaceful inaction, so far as concerned the development of our secret pact. The night-attacks stopped and Mary Lloyd looked happier and more beautiful every day, with the result that Castleman became the lover, "sighing like a furnace," and nothing else.

He "gave that girl a rush," in the words of the South, with all the whole-heartedness of the Dixie cavalier. He took her to theater, to after-theater suppers, always chaperoned by his ally Mrs. Cary, and spent his odd minutes in devising ways to pleasure his fair lady. But he ran true to strain and insisted that I take my turn as escort in addition to making my professional visits. We made our calls on alternate days at the Fifth Avenue mansion, and met only at the gymnasium for a few minutes at a time.

Those were rich days, rich in emotional experience and satisfaction, and filled every minute with wholesome doings. For the first time I reveled in the luxury of well-lined pockets—lined with my own earnings, for Uncle John wrote beautiful checks whereon my name preceded an absurd number of ciphers, so that I paid Wheeler's loan and carried a check-book myself. It would be foolish to deny that I could not get Mary Lloyd's face out of mind—that her clear sweet voice rang in my ears and filled every silence. But I told myself always that it was only her vivid beauty and all-powerful charm; that this too would pass in time.

As to White, I quote him direct:

"There's no use, Doc! The Cunnel's got the inside track, a big lead, and he is goin' level under double wraps. We are also-rans—can't get near enough to pocket the cuss or squeeze him out on the corners. Now I got to pull out o' the race. I'm in too fast company—out o' my class—and if I keep on seein' that girl I'll go bad. I want to be a good Indian, but if I stick around and look on I just natchally got to dig up the hatchet and go to ghost-dancin'. It's too much for Bob!"

For all his mixed-metaphorical light speech, there was that in his large-featured face, drawn and lined with power of passion and control, which made me ache in sympathy. So of course I said the wrong thing when I replied—

"They were made for each other."

He looked far ahead with eyes that clouded with pain as he rumbled from the deeps of his chest—

"That's the —— of it!"

"Has it struck you—" I hastened to change the subject—"that we hear nothing of the 'unspeakable quest' these days?"

I took a look around the greening lawn of the Island, for White had come over on one of his rare visits to me at the Pen and we were walking along the shore-path. I added:

"I almost forgot to look for eavesdroppers and to turn on the conspirators' whisper. Have you had any orders from higher up lately?"

"Uh-huh!" he answered listlessly. "That reminds me—Dan Wheeler told me yesterday to tell you there'll be another package soon—this week perhaps. And he said, 'Don't forget what you're here for—you three boys!' D'you know, Doc—" he came alive suddenly and looked at me with his old vital interest—"if it wasn't for that Dan Wheeler I'd think all that funny business on the river that day was just a fool dream? Somehow I can't take much stock in that business—it's so durn impossible and foolish—only when Wheeler turns on those tiger-green lamps. Then he makes me feel 'like yo' foot's asleep, all over!' as

Digitized by Google

the nigger said. Say, you know that little Indian that tends door at the gambling-place sometimes?"

"He's not an Indian," I corrected him, "he's a Jap, and he has worked for Wheeler for years."

"All the same thing—all copper-skinned, straight-haired, and smooth-bore inside. Well, Sibley took me into the place the other night, and on the way he talked right out again about the secret order without a name. Just to show he didn't give a whoop for anything or anybody he asks this Jap-Indian at the door, 'Mike, what do you say about the Order of Silent Men, or the Nameless Order?' And what you s'pose the little cuss did? He flops on his knees, bumps his head on the mat and says: 'I salute that man who ask that question. He belong either to that honorable order—' then he stands up and says—'or he goes soon to his ancestors.' Now d'you suppose Wheeler put him up to that?"

"I think not. Remember, it was a Jap nobleman of the first order who welcomed us to the Outer Circle. I have seen more than you of this thing, and I warn you, you are talking too much, without permission—better not! I'd not be Sibley, after saying that, for all the gold coined in money!"

"Oh, I don't know," White said slowly. "He's got a good slice of it, and I sure admire a man who can take care of himself any time or place. I can't see why the Cunnel is so stand-offish with Sibley. Sibley surely has spread himself to give us a good time."

"Castleman hasn't had the gloves on with him; you have. It makes a difference. Besides, Castleman can't see anything straight these days—he's in love!"

"By heck!" The big Westerner looked at his watch and flushed. "I got just time to keep a date in town!"

And he ran for the launch that was whistling at the float, while I went back to the Pen for sick-line. Afterward I learned that his date was with Miss Kelly, the pretty nurse on the Post-Clinic staff who had caught him on the rebound. But at the time I had too much else to take my attention.

The Pen hospital took my forenoons, on operation days, and until 2 P. M. The gymnasium work filled two hours more, leaving late afternoon and evening to my own devices. Every second day this time was filled with my beautiful patient: matinees, walks, motoring in her own car—then motor cars were new enough to be a gambling proposition—anything in fact to keep her amused and happy. And as for me, as I said before, I should have been a poor stick if I had not been—perhaps not in love, but most certainly in a condition far from tranquil or indifferent. But enough about me, as me. What was odd was this:

On my off-afternoons, when I did not see Mary Lloyd, and therefore when Castleman was with her, I was sure to meet Clark Sibley, by chance or purpose. And he almost invariably had something to propose for my entertainment. White often made a third, and he was within bounds when he said Sibley laid himself out to be agreeable. He was keenly alive, a good story-teller and a free spender, and he seemed to be able to do anything in New York. Policemen saluted him and politicians gave him the open hand; theater-seats were never sold out when he came to the window, and no door closed in his face. Two weeks in almost daily intimacy with him made me look upon him almost as a real friend. And yet—but what does it matter what I felt?

The odd thing about it all was that I was living just then to get Mary Lloyd well, normally happy, and free from her obsession of fear of this man. After the first mention of him, when she said he would get me like all the rest, in the eating-place that night, his name was never mentioned between Mary Lloyd and me. Odder still, I knew she was as sane as I, with a mind uniquely logical and clear for a woman, and I never doubted that she had reasons for her fear and loathing of Clark Sibley.

Looking back at that dream-like fortnight, I can only explain my actions on the ground that I was partly hypnotized by him as she prophesied. It is not a pleasant thing to admit. I always thought I had some solidity and steadiness of purpose—I was younger then.

Then came the night when I ventured a second time to take Mary Lloyd to Moreau's for supper after the theater. I wanted to wipe out the effect of the first evening, when she had been so terrified—either by the mix-up or her glimpse of Clark Sibley, I never asked her which—so I had asked Sibley the day before if he thought I

Digitized by Google

could take her there again with no unpleasant outcome. I recall my words: "I want to make her forget the last time. She was scared sick that time."

"She won't be scared tomorrow night, and she won't see me," he interrupted, as he had a way of doing, with perfect coolness.

Moreover, as was the case whenever I looked to see him displeased or ill-tempered, he went on to offer helpful advice. "I will have Wheeler watching in the next room, and if I were you I'd have White at table—" he turned his pale-gray pupils slowly on me—"unless you want her to yourself!"

"A good plan. Thank you, I will!"

That gave him one of his queer long-staring spells, when he looked at you until you began to feel sleepy, at the end of which he murmured half to himself—

"Either you are an *n*th power demon, or —forget it, old man!" And he slapped my back. "Go to it! Good luck!"

You can't help feeling kindly toward a man who does so much for you, unless you are too cheap to look a dog in the face.

THAT evening was perfect, up to the very last moment. White joined us after the theater, and walked to the restaurant with Mary, I following with Mrs. Cary. We had a little room—not the same—to ourselves, and M. Vigny outcheffed himself on the supper. Mary was herself, making each of us a bit better than our best, right up to the coffee. Then White, who had given us snatches of a veritable epic of the plains, with a big generous humor all his own, suddenly threw a bomb.

"But I never was trimmed so quick and pretty as I was the other night—right here in Sanders' gym, by a man twenty pounds lighter—when I stubbed my jaw on Sibley's left mitt! I had a lovely nap, didn't I, Doc? How long were you fellows pouring water on— What you stamping on my foot for?"

But I didn't have to answer. Mary Lloyd was smiling happily as she listened to him, but at the name of Sibley her face went out like a lamp. I can see the gray pallor and pain of terror that blighted its brilliant beauty for the instant, before she clapped both hands to her eyes and became hysterical. She made no fuss nor noise—just turned to Mrs. Cary, who came to her on the instant, and hid her face on that kind lady's breast like a child hurt too much to cry out.

She shook with a few restrained sobs, while Mrs. Cary told me to call the car; and before White had had time to shoot himself, even if he had had his gun on his hip, she was herself again. She gave him a smile with her apology for being silly, but let Mrs. Cary take her home without protest. And that was the end of that evening—the upshot of my brilliant scheme.

At the Fifth Avenue home, after Mrs. Cary had gone—White was waiting outside to escort her afoot, alone, and in suicidal rage—she said to me:

"I shall not be afraid of that place any more, James. You were quite right to take me there, and it did me good—don't look so solemn! But it was a shock I can't help or explain—to hear that name. I think it's because I—because Clark Sibley can't be beaten at anything! He always wins too easily—always succeeds, and no one whom he hates ever escapes. He hates me—and I know he will get me, some time. If I knew he had failed once—been beaten at anything at all, even at marbles—" her try for lightness was pitiful—"I think I should be free."

And with great dark eyes wide and dilated, she stared at a distant horror while she drew a long breath with catches in it.

I did mighty well not to take her in my big clumsy arms right there and get thrown down the steps by the front-hall statesman as I deserved. I held to the seat of my chair and managed to grate out:

"You will get over that. I will see that you do."

Though my mouth was dry as absorbent cotton, I must have got some meaning into the last words, for she brightened up at once.

White waylaid me on my way to the Island and dragged me to Castleman's rooms.

"He's got to be told!" White looked sick-a-week. "And he can do what he wants with me. Say—reckon he'd like that rawhide quirt at my diggin's? It'll cut to the bone, ev'ry lick, if you know how!"

"Don't be a bigger fool—there's a pair of us! What good will it do to make him feel the way we do?" I balked on the sidewalk of Broadway, before the old Fifth Avenue Hotel. "Let's go home and—think!"

Digitized by Google

"Think ——! Come on!" And he dragged me on.

Castleman was up and dressed; glad to see us, and heard White's story with sympathy. At the end he only said eagerly:

"Man—that's great! All we got to do is to beat him good and plenty, at something. I believe it would do her good! We ought to manage it between us."

"Yip! Yippee!" White jumped from his chair—three feet clear from the floor—and triple-cracked his heels together. "Cunnel, you're a prince among gentlemen with a head full o' brains! I got it—you got it, I mean! Sibley's goin' to pull off a private prize-fight evenin' on the q-t for his swell sportin' friends. Told me today he was goin' to ask us three.

"He's got two pairs of good lightweights and he's lookin' for a heavyweight to face *him*, see! But he's too well known as a terror—hasn't found a man good enough to give him a run for his money, and no fake fight will get by. Men—" he set his teeth in a wild-eyed grin that was frightful to look at, while with each gritted word he chunked a savage fist into his other palm—"I can lick that cuss and I will!"

VIII

ALL this time I had only one worry. Whether it was at the gym or on the street, alone or in a crowd, Wheeler met me with the same curl of his cruel, thin lips, the same hostile flare in his long green eyes. For all I had seen him do this before—feign anger with me for good reasons—it hurt. Moreover, although I do not claim to be a brave man, I have the courage to admit that I was afraid of Dan Wheeler, and I took care to make occasion to speak to him on the chance that he would give sign of understanding, if only a wink.

That was why I waited in the gymnasium lobby under the running-track, the afternoon after White's announcement, in the hope of delivering White's challenge to Sibley, through Dan as Sibley's Second. I had promised to be in White's corner myself, and I was more excited than if I were to don the mitts.

Inside a minute Dan entered from the street with Sibley—two strikingly well-groomed and handsome figures. I couldn't help noticing how the students and would-be sports made way for and worshiped the two notables from a distance, staring and whisper-nudging as they stood shivering in their undress. For it was free knowledge that the "Y. M. C. A." Sibley was for advertising purposes only, and that in reality he was gloriously sinful and dangerous, while Wheeler's bare presence spoke for itself.

Dan would have passed me unnoticing, but Sibley held his arm and greeted me with the even-ivory smile.

"Get your card, Doctor?" He referred to the engraved invitation to the "swagger fight-fest" of the next Friday night, which I had received that morning.

"Thank you, yes. And I have a man to meet you for the third event. White would like to have the honor, and has asked me to second him."

"Fine! Hear that, Dan Wheeler? Think I shall last three rounds?"

Sibley still smiled and his delicate features looked more feminine than ever as he assumed a coquettish smirk.

"Yeh—if you shadow-box! Go you a thou he never shows up!" Wheeler daintily removed his gloves, unaware of my existence. "Better not advertise a third bout—or give an exhibition of bag-punching!"

His contempt was searing, and made me boil over.

"I'll take you—if he is able to walk; and if he's not in condition I'll furnish somebody to take his place, if I have to do it myself, or forfeit the thousand!"

I actually had a little more than that bank balance at the moment.

"You'll take his place!" Wheeler swept me from the feet up, as if I had that instant sprouted. "I have a flashlight!" And his cold smile was tired.

"It would be a good fight either way!" Sibley's compliment was seriously comforting. "I believe you took the middleweight and heavyweight cups, both, in college?"

Wheeler's lips drew down a sixteenth inch, and I turned a fiery scarlet as I answered:

"The heavy only by default. But I can stand up until I am hit, anyhow. No fear, however. White will be there, all there, and I know where there is even money he will stay four rounds."

"Who'll stay four rounds with whom?" inquired young Blake, a second-growth millionaire sport who came up on his way to the sparring-room with Taylor.

Introduced to me and informed on the

Digitized by Google

new bout by Sibley, he sized me up as if I were a race-horse, feeling my chest and arm muscles as well as my lower head and neck.

"I'll take four figures of that myself, if the other man is as good as this one," he said. "How about it, Taylor?" And he turned to the old ring general.

"The other man 'as it on the Doctor in weight," Taylor answered cautiously, "but the Doctor 'as better footwork and half-an-inch the reach of Mr. W'ite. I should siy eyether one would outlahst the four rounds, hif 'e uses 'is 'ead an' doesn't try f'r a knockaout. It's a bettin'-proposition, as you might siy!"

"So's the weather," Wheeler commented, "in a thunder-storm!"

And he turned away wearily in a chorus of sycophantic cackles. I didn't see the point—don't yet. But I was feeling serious over my rash promise. I didn't yearn to go out in half a minute, as White had done, and I knew Sibley had skill, confidence, and everything in his favor. It only remained for me to hope that nothing would happen to keep White from entering the ring on Friday night.

If by any chance I had to take his place, I hoped I should take my medicine as gracefully as he had done once before. Just the same, by this time I had an undercurrent of smoldering desire to get a good stiff punch at the invincible Sibley on Mary Lloyd's account, and I went at my exercise with his baleful but finished presence dancing before me; and when I had finished a warm two-minutes with Taylor (he had a vanishing head like a goose—you hit it and it wasn't there) he panted:

"My word, Doctor! You're as fit to fight f'r your life—as ever you were! That 'and-over-'and rush of yours ain't accordin' to the best ring-traditions, but it cert'nly is 'ard to stop! I give you that. I believe I'll 'ave you show me 'ow you keep your balance w'ile you drive in so fahst, if you 'ave the time?"

"Sure!" I got red with pleasure. "It's simple—used to practise it with my first instructor. You just walk one foot forward then the other, flat-footed, with short steps, and punch with the opposite hand. Like this: left—right—left—right, and look at the place where you don't hit!"

I did it easily from long practise.

"Put your man on to it!" the grizzled old warrior whispered, when he had tried it out, "and tell 'im to use it ahfter landin' a stiff punch to the jaw or neck. It might win f'r 'im—you cahn't tell!"

There was no time to coach White on the hand-over-hand rush, for the three days until the night of the fight were too busy. And then Friday afternoon, just as I had finished my rounds in the woman's ward and had sat down for my usual five-minutes' chat with Aunt Mary and Fannie Wellman, things began to happen in bunches—big bunches.

Fannie had just jolted me with an arch remark out of a clear sky.

"Doctor, have you any big bets on the fight tonight?"

She had color now, and her smile, in spite of the prison garb and the ugly flat hair-dress required of all convicts, made her a little black-eyed beauty as she dimpled and sparkled at me happily. I saw Aunt Mary enjoying her brilliancy as she would that of a gem, only with a kindly sympathy overlaid, as I asked—

"What do you—what fight?"

"Ah, what fight?" Fannie mocked. "That's just the point—who is going to fight? But your man looks husky enough; I don't think he'll faint or throw a fit between now and midnight, so you needn't shiver in your shoes!"

"Sh-h! Kendal's on the job as usual!"

Aunt Mary held up her sewing to get a general view and to hide Fannie's face, for it had leaked out—heaven knows how—that Kendal was a lip-reader, and had kept that accomplishment secret long enough to come possessed of awkward facts not meant for her.

"—— that pussy-footed hussy!" Aunt Mary exclaimed. "She rubbers in her sleep, I do believe. An' leak! I'd not dare tell 'er 'er shoe was unlaced!"

She trained on the offending orderly her steeliest spectacled glance until Kendal flushed and withdrew with nose in the air; then the diamond queen turned on me with her merry chuckle that showed her perfect white teeth.

"But, my word, Doctor, you're comin' to be a rare lady-killer! Kendal says to me yesterday: 'Ain't the Doctor gettin' handsomer every day? I got the notion he's in love,' she says, 'probably with some little baby-faced simp that don't know she's livin'. The best of 'em fall f'r a peach-and-cream skin!' she says. 'Sure he is!' I tells

Digitized by Google

her. 'You're dead slow. I could give you 'er nime and address!' I says. She ain't slep' a wink since. If she can't get hep to the gel soon, you'll find an old gun-moll stiff in 'er bed some fine day! 'Ow is the swell patient, any'ow, Doctor?"

The clear blue eyes were as kind as they were keen in their wise twinkle. For I could not keep cool and unruffled at the implication that I was in love with Mary Lloyd, even though I knew I was a child crying for the moon.

But it was then that I got a message from the office that drove everything from my mind. The Dep in person had come up to the men's ward to tell me that at last Jas. G. Dillon, the "Old Man," or the new Warden, had returned and would like to see me in the office—his office.

"I can't give you a steer, Doc—y'might as well try t'read a wooden Indian as to get anything from that map o' Jas. G.'s," Murphy hurriedly whispered as he met me at the door of the Doctor's office where he was waiting. "But the fewer words, the less trouble—and don't try to fool 'im. Spit 'er out short and plain, and don't try to polish. 'F he's got you salted, it's to the timber f'r yours—no use to swing and rattle; and if you're in right, the stiffer you stand the quicker you get 'im goin'! As I said first-off, I hope you stay with us, but you sure have played —— with his new rules! Give it to 'im straight. And—good luck!"

The crisp and gruff Deputy gave me the crook's lucky-touch on the back, almost with shyness, and blew his nose like a trumpet as I left him.

All down the winding iron stairs, as I passed the four tiers or layers of stone cells, I was reviewing the many things I had done to excite the wrath of the iron-willed tyrant, Jas. G. Dillon. He was said to be square—the crook's highest term of respect—but without bowels; a merciless martinet who never slept, never forgot nor forgave and never changed his mind.

I had ousted the doctor of his choice, transferred trusties on grounds of health and efficiency, and in general paid no attention to the edicts he had issued before leaving for his short vacation. On the other hand I could point to a well working staff and economy in the hospital, and my hands were clean so far as graft was concerned.

In the absence of detailed instructions from the mysteriously hostile Dan Wheeler, I had done the best I knew. If I now lost my position as Pen physician and spoiled Wheeler's scheme for landing the demon of the Crimson Chamber, it would not be my fault. Why had he kept us all in the dark?

The Warden's office was a small square building of gray granite in front of the central main entrance of the prison, and reached by a short covered passage of stone and glass. No one ever entered this passageway—not even the Dep—without orders from the despot himself. The dignified Mr. Kelley rose from his arm-chair in the hall to precede me along this awful way and to announce with bass severity—

"Doctorr Cor-rbin, sir-r!"

I FOUND myself in the square, well-lighted room — all glistening, polished oak: floor, furniture and wainscoting—that gave free view of the lawns and river on its three glass sides. Two desks on the left were empty, but their typewriters held unfinished work, showing that an interview of importance was toward. A third desk, huge and flat-topped, had on it one small pencil-pad, and on the other side of it sat the Warden, watching me from under heavy grizzled brows.

Jas. G. Dillon looked the part. His face was hard and square, heavily savage—no more human than the flinty walls that bounded his little despotism—and he was heavy and square. He looked as if it would take a hydraulic jack to stir him from his ponderous oak chair.

"Will you be seated, Doctor Corbin?"

It was a preliminary command, and I took the leather-seated chair that had been placed so that I faced the light.

The Warden glanced at the little pad, moved it an inch to the right but square with the desk still and looked up at me as he asked quickly—

"Why did you come here last Summer?"

If he meant to jar me he failed. The very harshness of his voice recalled by contrast the rare gentleman and ripe scholar, Mr. Washburn, who had preceded him. I could see how that eminent criminologist had risen from that same chair to greet me with the warm smoothness that belongs to inherited wines and gentility. And I answered now as I had answered the former Warden, the other time.

Digitized by Google

"To make good for Mac!"

For I had undertaken to finish Mac's term of service, so that he might take a better appointment and not seem to run away from danger.

"That means to clean up the service—to finish the dangerous job he had started?"

The cool comprehension and instant acceptance of my motives did startle me. I noticed that Mr. Dillon had a splendid head above his large ears, as I answered respectfully:

"Yes, sir. Just that!"

"And you did it?"

"With help, yes, sir!"

He made a brief note on the little pad, and after a moment said—

"Meaning Dan Wheeler's help."

It was not a question, and I said nothing. The Warden seemed to size me up for a bit before he asked—

"And this time?"

I took time to think before I said—

"I wanted a place to stay while I looked around."

"You got it—" he watched me closely—"with help—the same help?"

"I don't know, for sure; but with Wheeler's advice, yes, sir."

"If you were assured that next year—say next Winter—a separate hospital building would be built and equipped, with comfortable quarters for the Doctor; and if a small salary were added, say seventy-five a month, enough for clothes and car-fare, would you consider remaining for a year from July 1st?"

This offer would have taken away my breath two weeks before, but not now!

"I should want time to decide," I said slowly, "but I thank you."

"The idea is the Commissioner's. It is a mere matter of economy—you save the Department more than you cost. Take two weeks for consideration. Now for another matter, and you will notice this office was built for talking secrets."

He cast about him a slow glance before leveling on me with the query—

"Why are you here *now?*"

"I came here," said I carefully, "to get—for the reason I gave before. I was hard up."

"Why were you—" he leaned forward and raised a large forefinger slowly—"put here?"

The gray eyes bored like cold steel. I met them, although I flushed as I answered—

"I can't—tell you."

He held the finger and the keen eyes motionless for a full fifteen seconds before he leaned back with something like a breath of relief.

"Good! I think they made no mistake—you're no artist in deception, but you can keep your mouth shut. Once more, please make sure there's nobody in the passage!"

I went to the door—a clear spot in the frosted glass showed the passageway empty—and came back to my chair with a nod. Mr. Dillon went on—

"Once more let me remind you we are as safe from spying, even from a lip-reader with a telescope, as we would be in a boat on the river, for instance."

Here he saw my eyes wander to the desks with closed sides, and his eyes wrinkled curiously at the corners.

"Nobody concealed, not even a dictograph!" he assured me. "Let me put your mind at rest. I am acting on orders from inside, myself, and I don't approve or relish it. I am a man who has always gone after what he wanted in a straight line, and I have no use for detectives or mysteries. I should not mention the matter without good reason. But I have always been a sound organization man, always obeyed orders as I want them obeyed, without question, and I have it from the Chief of the city organization, himself, that I am to work with you in this matter. You understand?" Now that he had brought himself to speak, he talked with explicit clearness.

"Yes, sir!"

I must have shown my astonishment that this man of rough granite, as well as the political boss himself, was under orders from the Nameless Brotherhood, for he said gruffly:

"The thing sounds cheap enough—I'd not believe it from many men—but the Chief said to me: 'Jim, make no mistake! I take orders from them, and when I get word from inside I go to it on my toes!" And then he introduced me to a little Jap, a Count he called him, as the Man Higher Up. This—Count What's-his-name told me you were here on business that—well, it may be true, I don't know. If it is, we can't be too careful. You follow me?"

Clearly he was referring to the leak in the Government plans.

Digitized by Google

"Yes, sir." I was holding my breath. "Did he mention the—Crimson Chamber?"

"He did—that part of it I know to be true. It has bothered the Chief for some time, and—that's why I say we can't be too careful. To come to the main business. The Count asked me to tell you that your next order would come to you through me. Understand?"

"Yes, sir, and the order?"

"Order—if you call it that. He said: 'Tell him the end is in sight. Let no personal feelings stand in the way.' And—" the Warden paused, seemed about to throw a furtive look around, conquered that weakness and finished in a lower tone—"it sounds actionable, criminal, but his words were, 'We may kill tonight.' I am repeating his message, remember. I assume no responsibility and I wash my hands of the consequences."

"I understand perfectly. Was that all?"

"All but this: He said to tell you that you will be well paid!' Then he was gone before I could ask any explanation. I don't like the looks of the business from any side, and I wish I were well out of it."

The Warden stopped to knit his high forehead, then went on:

"But I should do less than my duty if I did not tell you what the Chief said after the Count bowed himself out. He seemed troubled, sat tapping the desk for some time before he said to me: 'Never anything like this came up in my time, or any other! Jim Dillon, tell that young man to be on the job, and do your part to the limit, or we may all go up in smoke. That's how serious it is!'

"When I asked him if he could explain any further," the Warden continued, "he said: 'No use! If we win, nobody will believe it happened. If we lose, I will put you wise in time to buy your ticket for San Francisco, Jim. Do your best, and forget it!' That was all he told me, for publication."

The worried frown on the Warden's broad shiny forehead was deeper as he recalled the interview. He seemed to be loyally imitating his Chief, and I felt suddenly sorry for him—I was very young, remember.

"That's all, then." He turned to draw another small pad from his desk. "Will you tell Mr. Kelley to send in the stenographers, on your way out?"

"Yes, Doctor." Mr. Kelley saluted with deep respect and barked over his shoulder: "Brent! Offus!"

And when the two striped office-clerks had disappeared through the door leading to the Warden's office, Kelley faced me once more with the same familiar deference.

"A friend of yours, Doctor, waitin' in the Dep's parlor," he said. "I see he didn't look first-rate an' I ask' the Dep could he wait in there where the crooks wouldn' be rubberin'. It's the big lad that was here before, an' he's had an injury t' the scalp, I sh'd judge—wears a plaster, anyway!"

And as he spoke, in his most judicial manner he ushered me along the hall to the Dep's comfortable quarters.

"HELLO, White! What's the matter with your head?" I asked as the big fellow got up and came to meet me.

He was a bit pale, and a long strip of adhesive over his ear looked as if it might cover a nasty cut.

"Scratched it on a splinter. Glad you came, Doc. Stone walls and steel bars may not make a prison, as the fellah said, but they sure put up a correct imitation, and they were gettin' on my nerves. Any place where we can talk a while, and then get out o' here?"

"Lots of places. I promised to show you the prison."

I was leading him through the main hall of the administration building toward the corridor of the prison proper, or the long space between the outer walls and the tiers, or cell-stacks. I saw he was loaded with news, and he whispered over my shoulder—

"The isolated."

We were just entering the main corridor, and at the door stood Kennedy.

"Mr. Kennedy, this is Mr. White of Colorado and New York." I introduced the two six-and-a-half-footers, and a splendid pair they made. "I want to show him the isolated corridor and our song-birds in it. Can I trouble you to unlock it or send a keeper with us?"

"Proud to meet Mr. White!" The growl of the iron old man was cordial, and he turned on me with a flat-hand slap on the chest that jarred me to my taps. "Throuble—is ut!" He turned on his brogue with a roar. "Wha-at talk have ye—ye spalpeen?

Digitized by Google

For why should I throuble me ould bones f'r the likes av ye—two spindlin' young rapscallions? Come along wit' ye! In ye go fast enough, but will ye come out again, I dunno? Hickey! Bread an' bucket this way!"

He summoned one of his trusty cleaners to bring a day's rations of bread and water with the lime-bucket that was changed each twenty-four hours—usually at noon—and on the way explained to me:

"A new nut in clink, Doc. He went on the loose while you were in the office just now. It's Jas. G.'s orders not to butt in on his privacy short o' life an' death, an' the Dep's in town, so I clapped 'im in here to keep 'im fr'm stirrin' up a ruction on the tiers when they come in. Ye c'n see what ye think of him. He's no common crook be the looks of 'im—name's Morrison—came over last week and st'ed quiet enough till now—raised a holler all at once. A dope-fiend p'raps."

"Pardon me, Mr. Kennedy." I interrupted because White was nudging and whispering in my ear that he must have a word with me alone, and quick. On the instant I could only think of a childish excuse, but I tried it. "Mr. White here wants to know how it feels to be shut in solitary confinement for a minute. Anybody in the dark cells since morning?"

"Nar'a wan!" We were passing the entrance to the short dark corridor at the moment, and the Head Keeper turned the big key in the old lock even as he spoke. "Here ye are—I thried it wance, be mistake, and I'd not thank ye t' give me the likes of it again. In wid ye! If ye think ye'll want five minut's av ut, I'll be after inspectin' the first tier new while ye wait?"

"Just the thing; we can't get out until time's up if we want to. Don't forget us!"

"Small loss av I did!" growled Kennedy, as he shut the heavy door on us and the bolt clanked home.

"This ain't black dark," said White, looking about at the short corridor, now dimlit by the small barred window at the end.

"If I shut that window, as they do when there's a man in a cell, it'll be black enough to suit——"

"Not for Bob!" White caught me by the arm as I started toward the small opening. "I can't use much of this as it is. Say, Doc! Here's my complaint: This Morrison, now—know anything about him?"

"No—new man—why?"

"This morning I got a piece o' paper with, 'See Morrison, Isolated Pen,' scribbled in pencil, and here your Main Fellow says this man Morrison don't get in isolated any, till this noon! How's that?"

He paused, finger on open palm and steady gaze on my face.

"Easy! He got his orders and got put in, same time! But hurry up, man, you've got something up your sleeve!"

"I got it in the neck—and on the nut! Right here!"

He indicated the plaster with a queer slow smile that lighted his steady, large-featured face.

"Tell me quick! Will that lick on the head put you out," I asked, "so you won't be up to meeting Sibley tonight?"

"Nah! Only a scratch, 'n' a bump. Plaster's for looks! But where I got it's the point. You know Pier Number ——, where we met Wheeler and the dummy that morning? Stands to reason it didn't happen—all that Nameless Order business, y'know, but I——"

"Yes—yes! Go ahead! You'll find there's no joke about this thing. How'd you get your head cracked?"

"Well, I'll tell you if you don't stop me before I get started." White actually seemed aggrieved, in a dazed fashion that I understood later. "Remember the matched-pearl necklace I told you I was going to get, and the big solitaire diamond pendant, or ring, in the window?"

"Yes—yes!" I again interrupted his rather confused speech. "It was in Tiffany's window. There was a diamond pendant on the necklace and a ring, too, at the same price, fifty thousand each. You didn't try to steal 'em?"

"I bought 'em both and took 'em home in my pocket—told you I would—but the man said I better not carry 'em around, too many slick hold-ups lately. I wanted to gloat a few, though, so I took 'em to my room and when I woke up they had the ring and were looking for the necklace. I hid it under some dirty shirts in the closet, and by the time they found it the towel had slipped and I was pretty near myself—near enough to play possum and watch with my eyes most shut. See?"

His eyes narrowed as he grinned.

Digitized by Google

I did see—now. I could smell the chloroform in his breath, and knew why he was mixing his story.

"I see; they overpowered you in your room and chloroformed you—must have beaten you to your boarding-house and waited there. Did they get away with the jewels, and was that how you got hurt?" I asked slowly and clearly.

"Got away clean—right in daylight! But I followed 'em to the river where they had a launch waiting. Thought they were safe then, but little Bobby had the *Scat* only five blocks up—you know, you tol' me about 'er? Another surprise I had for you. Got *her*, you know!"

"Yes—go on!"

I had told him, I recalled, that "Hank" Seton, whom I had tutored for Sheff, would sell his *Scat*, the fastest steam-launch on the water. It looked as if White had suddenly cut loose and bought everything in sight. It looked like insanity, in fact, but I wanted to hear the rest, and asked—

"Did you follow them in the *Scat?*"

"Did I? Didn't we? I had a hired man keeping up steam, 'cause I was goin' to try that hide-hole some night, m'self! Got tired waitin' f'r your man Wheeler to nose 'em out——"

"Yes, I know, but you followed the thieves with the jewels—what then?"

"What then—I should say what then! This!" He pointed to his head. "I got this when we caught 'em. Maybe we didn't split that ol' East River up the back! Talk about speed! Mmm! Man dear! There was water all over the place. See, I'm wet yet." And though he had changed his outer clothes, his underclothes were still damp. "But right there's where Little Bobby drap his m'lasses-jug—when we caught 'em! When I tried to board 'er, tried to jump the launch, this here Wheeler man didn't do a thing t'poor ol' Bob White—lit on me all spraddled out!

"When I come to, a cop was pourin' water on my hired man, and he ask' me what I thought I was doin'—playin' East River pirate? I tried t' tell 'im 'bout it] 'n' he said I was drunk—he knew Wheeler—and I better go with him an' tell the man at the desk about it, then I'd get a night's lodgin' for nothing. Cost me twenty-five more to get him let me loose—and Brer Wheeler gets the sparklers. Where does that leave us at? What?"

I had let him ramble on, while I was trying to find out just that thing, what it all meant—how much had really happened and how much he thought had happened.

"Just where we were before," I answered quietly, to steady him, for I wasn't sure he was not suffering from concussion as well as chloroform. "You thought you saw Wheeler; are you sure you didn't dream that about Morrison and the isolated cell?"

"Dead sure! Perhaps I am dreamin' this head, but it feels mighty real! You hear me? There's somebody wants to come in!"

IT WAS Kennedy unlocking the door, and as we came out into the lighted main corridor I asked the wise old warrior—

"Think this Morrison is faking his bug?"

"I dunno, Doc!" he growled under his breath. "But don't give any of 'em a chanct to get to ye like the 'Gorilla' did! Ar're ye listenin' lad? There's a nigger in the wood-pile somewhere, or I'm a Ginney! This big Swede an' Henry ar-re bot' in here—fakin'. There's a frame on an' mebbe this lad Morrison is in ut, but he's a more likely-lookin' lad—I'll say that for um. But don't let ar' a wan of 'em get ye in a cell alone. I'd not put it past 'um t' have a ripper up their back—anny av 'em!"

"I don't think they'd try the same trick again; and Devery says he has searched 'em for knives every day since Henry tried it on Walsh."

Just the same I was on the watch when we were let into the isolated corridor No. Two, and did not go farther than the door until Kennedy had gone to the far end and swung back the steel shutter to let in a shaft of light. Opening off this stone corridor there were six cells, every second one occupied, and Morrison was at the far end, next the outer wall and the little window.

While Kennedy was unlocking Henry's cell, White walked to the door where I told him Morrison was confined and hurried back to whisper to me:

"Fix it so I can chin with him a minute. He says he can tell me all about the Crimson Chamber! This is what I been looking for."

"Sh-h! I'll fix it. Mr. Kennedy, can the man change Morrison first? Mr. White would like to speak to him while you are attending to the others."

"Sure, anything at all! Hickey, lock

Digitized by Google

that cell and tend to Number One fir-rst. Step lively now! Don't go too near the bar-rs, me lad, these same bugs have th' jump an ye. Av they commit murder they only get their boord in Matteawan; an' that's comin' t'thim annyway. And lave it to thim to git wise t' that same!"

When the trusty had changed Morrison's lime-bucket and water-can, and put on the floor his daily chunk of bread, Kennedy locked him in again and announced that he was ready for visitors.

"And this Dutchman's been fakin' a cough, Doctor; claims he's gettin' the T. B. in the damp. Will ye look 'um over?"

My ancient enemy came out coughing and scowling, and I went over his chest thoroughly. There were moist rales, but the trusty was scuffling about in the big Swede's cell near-by, and I could hardly hear.

"I want to be sure about this, Mr. Kennedy." I turned to the big Head Keeper who was watching every move of my patient. "Please stop your man making that racket so I can tell whether there really is any moisture here, or if he has just inhaled some water from his can."

For this was a trick I had learned long since, and it was one hard to detect at times.

"No vater in id!" growled the ugly German, and it was true, as Kennedy saw at once.

"Stop thim feet, ye clompin' gomeril! Stand an 'um a spell!" roared the good-hearted old warrior. "No, go fill the can, an' don't fall aslape at th' tap or I'll appear t' ye!"

And as the trusty, wise to the lion's-roar and its harmlessness, ambled off grinning, Kennedy swung open the big door to the main corridor, at the same time warning Henry by a growl over his shoulder:

"And look ye now, ye Dutch divil. Star-rt anything av ye dare! Crazy or no, I'll have wan bash at the ugly map av ye fer luck! Ar-rre ye lis-stenin', thin?"

FOR one instant he took his eye off the open door of the cell that held the Swede giant. In that instant Henry kicked over the lime-bucket at his feet. With one lightning leap the huge Swede was out of his cell. Darting at Kennedy he pushed him through the door, headlong into the outer corridor, and at the same instant snatched the big bunch of keys from his hand.

He slammed and locked the heavy door with one movement, then turned on me, grimacing like a baboon, and dashed the keys at my head. All this happened at Henry's signal of the overturned bucket, and so swiftly that as I dodged the keys I noticed that the lime was just spilling from the bucket. At such moments of sudden stress some trifling detail stamps itself on the retina to stay.

Shut in with two murderous yeggs, both safe from the chair under the double protection of insanity and influential backing, and probably hired to put away one or both of us, what chance had White and I?

It would take Kennedy some minutes to get keys from the office. Oh, if White were only himself! These were the confused thoughts that flashed through my head under the shock of hopeless terror. All these things I thought of in the half-second that I crouched to face the Swede.

He came on, huge hands out and working claw-wise, mouthing with the primal-beast blood-lust, a gigantic monster.

Muscles taut and fear-strung, I crouched low, lower. Now I launched myself unthinking but terror-driven, straight at the pit of the brute's stomach. Like a battering-ram I struck him fair amidships, felt my head drive in the belly-wall, and with a coughing grunt he went down—huge arms enfolding me and claws tearing for my throat.

With wild vigor, panic-born, I freed myself from his clutch, leaving half my coat in each great claw, and sprang to my feet just in time to meet Henry. The vicious German would have been on me before, for he had struck down White from behind, rushing at him instantly with the bucket as his weapon, after giving the signal to the Swede. But he had tripped over White's legs and was now bending to pick up his bucket again.

Snatching up the bucket in the Swede's cell door, I hurled it at Henry. It struck too fair, bottom flat on his head, and only dropped him to his knees.

He was getting up and coming on again, just as I had to turn to face the big Swede. I heard the giant's heavy clumping step behind me—no time to swing on him—I could only drop to all fours and trip him over me into Henry's arms.

Digitized by Google

In the half-second thus gained I leaped up and back, seeing stars and feeling a needle-spurt from a cut over my eye, where the Swede's huge boot had caught me. Brushing the warm trickle from my eyes I got another vivid picture, so fear-stamped on my memory that I can shut my eyes and see it now.

Against the dim shaft of light from the end window, the dark figures of Henry and the giant Swede loomed twice larger than life, the Swede reaching out his long hairy arms as he came on, making guttural beast-noises in his throat; Henry darting around to get at me flank or rear.

At the same time, through my eye-corners, I was conscious that White was swaying weakly to his knees behind the two assassins. But he seemed to see only the bunch of keys on the floor beyond him. He was crawling after them slowly and on buckling limbs, while in cell No. One Morrison was shaking his barred door and shouting lustily.

No time to look again, only time to sidestep the Swede and trip him, then swing on Henry with all my weight behind my fist. It was a splendid drive into the short-ribs, and the German went down. But the force of my swing carried me on top of him, and on to my back the huge bulk of the Swede came piling.

I thought I was fighting to the limit before, but with the last ecstatic frenzy of despair I lashed out, dashing feet, hands and head at anything in reach, in a final wild effort to keep free from a lethal stranglehold. For they were both clutching at my throat with a ferocity that would soon overpower me.

It was only this—that they both interfered instead of working together, and my unnatural speed, raised to the *n*th power by terror—that had so far saved me from being choked by the giant claws. I could see the end coming. I was weakening already.

I landed one lucky kick on the Swede's ear-region. He swayed where he knelt over me, but before I could gain my feet I felt his great arms close around me from behind and enfold me like a baby. Henry was wrapped around my legs, lifting.

Straining and grunting fiercely, we toppled and fell. A great hairy grip on my throat shut off all air. I strained—swelled—was bursting with agony in a sea of fire. It clouded—faded—turned black—black!

IX

"DOCTOR! Doctor—lad! C'n ye see me, thin? D'ye know me at ahl—at ahl? Praise be—he's breathin'! Back there, ye —— fools! Give the lad air and a show fer his life—will ye? Now, lad—another wan! Wan more. Wather there—on 'is chist! May the saints ferget me, fer a thick-headed omadhon!

"Now thin—thry ag'in. Another wan! Dhrag it in! Whorroo! now ye're comin'. The saints be praised! By ——, Doc! They near got ye that time—thanks to me own foolishness. How're ye feelin, the now? 'F ye're hur-rted bad inside I'll twisht aff bot' th' dirrty necks av thim, 'f I go t'—— f'r ut tomorrow!" It was a sob at end.

Never before or since did I hear Kennedy so profane or so angry. I looked up into the tender, fierce old fighting-blue eyes, and they were wet and dark with genuine suffering.

"I'm all right—all over!" I replied.

I sat up, felt of my bruised and sore throat, and was surprised not to feel any pain elsewhere. I had been all pain in the coming to. All the prison not under lock and bar was around me, all pale and frightened. Mrs. Sullivan, head matron, was bathing my face on the other side, and she too had been crying—made one feel very much a fool.

"I don't need any help."

I got up to prove it, and found I had told the truth.

"How's White here?" I asked.

Kennedy roared twice as loud as ever and scattered the crowd like wind-driven leaves, just to prove he had no heart, as I bent over White who lay with his head in the lap of Burke, my surgical orderly.

"I'm all right, Doc!" White looked up at me wanly. "Got another scratch, but it needs a stitch or ligature—'s why I'm keepin' still."

Burke looked up and nodded. He was holding a pad on the wound to stop the bleeding. So I had White taken up to my little office and operating-room, on the top floor just off the end of the Women's ward. After plastering my little cut so the blood wouldn't run in my eye, I fixed him up with the help of Riley—by now an A-1 surgical nurse as well as keeper.

It was there, in the little new operating-room that was the pride of my eyes, that

Digitized by Google

Kennedy came to charge us in secret, after White's head was in a Barton bandage that was a poem, and Riley had departed in pride.

"B'yes, listen to an ould fool that has seen more throuble than fun f'r sixty year, this fortnight gone. Nar'a wan av thim dirty scuts will get to ye ag'in—thrust me f'r ut! But ye can see it was a frame—can ye not?"

"Sure it was, and a dirty one!" White sat up, flushed, bright-eyed and angry. "If there's an honest magistrate or officer of the law in this city, I am goin——"

"H'sst! Whoosh, lad! Wha-a-at ta-alk have ye!" Kennedy burst in. "Can't ye see a hole in a laddher? D'ye suppose ye'd get anything but the hot ind av ut? Av ye made y'rself too discomfortable and disthurbin', the' might land *ye* f'r a stretch, just t' show ye ye're lucky t'be livin'! Look at Radburn there!"

Raising an impressive forefinger to throttle interruption, the grizzled veteran slowly growled:

"The man that paid f'r this dir-rty business is no man f'r ye to go t' the mat with. D'ye get me?"

"Sure-lee!" White gritted his teeth. "But I got a tip where to go to meet up with the Main Guy in this—and me for him—now!"

"Tis betther sand than sinse ye'll be showin'! Listen t' a man that knows th' under-side av New York, knows ut fr'm Battery t' Harlem. Whatever ye have in mind, ferget ut! Lad, if ye want t' cross the Mississippi agen, don't thry t' buck the Machine! Whoiver framed this job had t' grease th' wheels av the machine firrst—he stands behind ut, and it'll take a sthrong man wit a sthrong dhrag t' git at 'um. An life's sweet t' ye, lad—lave it be!"

"Um-huh!" White grunted heavily. "Suppose, though, that I had backing strong enough, of men like Dan Wheeler and—" he turned on me—"what you kicking my shins for?"

"There might be some one listening," I answered, and looked out the door to make sure.

"Whin Dan Wheeler says he'll see ye through," Kennedy rumbled with impressive finger once more in evidence, "ye can be sure ye go through. But I'm listening f'r the name ye were puttin' ferninst Dan's. Who's the other man?

"Clark Sibley!"

White had it out before I could stop him. I was looking my reproach, but Kennedy's silence drew my attention.

The big grizzled head, dropped forward almost on his chest, hid the strong old face from me. But the slow side-shake and the silent lift of the broad shoulders meant anything you please.

"Well," I whispered in suspense, "what's wrong with Sibley? He is a heavy swell socially, great athlete, mighty popular, and has pull and money to burn!"

"Nothin' t' say!" Kennedy stood up and buttoned his blue coat over his deep chest. "Ye're likely lads. I took t' the bot' av ye at sight—an' I w'd hate t' see ye get the wor'rst av ut. But I've a family av three ginerations depindent an me. I've no word t' say!"

"But Wheeler is said to be in Sibley's employ!" I shot back and stood up eagerly.

"Ah-hah! Dan Wheeler wit' a boss over 'um! All good luck go wid ye, lads, ye nade ut!"

He marched out of the office and downstairs to his post. White looked at me for a minute by the clock before he said:

"We have had a plenty of this mystery-stuff and heavy 'settin'-'round—all we draw down is a few belts on the head, then another wise man tells us not to dare say 'Boo!' Doc, here's where I dig up the hatchet and go ghost-dancin' on my own. From now out I'm a bad Indian. If I got to get knocked in the head every few days anyhow, I figure it I might as well have a run for my money. Know what Morrison told me before I did my justly celebrated sleepin' stunt? Well, he is the only livin' man that helped fit up the Crimson Chamber, and he's just back from Europe—got himself in prison for safety—found they were on his track hot-foot, and got in Isolated for the same reason. Believe that?"

"I don't know," I answered truly. "I am more muddled every minute. I hope somebody is at the head of this business with a clear mind. What do you intend to do? With that head you can't——"

"I can find the place to get into the Crimson Chamber! Morrison said all the workmen had to go in by the water-entrance, under the pier and through a tunnel and up a 'lift.' Is that Cockney for elevator?"

"Yes—well?"

"Well, the man who bossed the job was

Digitized by Google

the only one who knew the other way in, and he was the first to disappear when the job was finished. When Morrison got wise to that, he hid away in the hold of a South American freighter; that's how-come he's alive now. He says he's paid big to come back and tell what he knows. Must be a mint o' money behind this, somewhere!"

"The Chamber must have netted millions —probably many other millionaires are so scared that they have loosened up," I conjectured, thinking of Mary Lloyd's jewels and her Uncle John's money. "You know that, yourself. Does Morrison know who is the Main Guy," I asked hopelessly, "or how the thing works—or how to stop it—or anything?"

"He says one or a couple of men work it; get a boob in the Chamber and turn on some kind o' gas—that fixes 'im!"

"What gas? Cyanic acid?"

"Depends on what they want to do—croak 'im, or only bring him to time—train him to follow at heel and stand without hitchin'. Now I rise to remark it's some game! Morrison says the only way they'll ever win out is to croak the Main Guy himself—or both of them. Says he don't dare get out of here until it's done, and he's afraid they'll poison him in here!"

Between the swollen lids, White's pupils were narrowed to pin-points, and the muscles rippled beneath the swarthy skin of his cheeks as he added:

"I'd sure admire to meet that Main Guy —the crook of the Crimson Chamber! I got a remark or two to make right now, while I feel like it."

He dropped his voice and the last words were muttered through clenched teeth.

"Now listen to reason," I said quietly, in the hope of calming him. "How d' you know Morrison isn't insane sure-enough? It's one of the commonest delusions to believe somebody's trying to poison one—delusions of persecution are the first symptom——"

"Insane nothin'! I didn't tell you they almost got him in the Crimson Chamber. He was chucked in the river for dead. But the weight tore out of his pockets and he was fished out, pumped out, and the doctor smelled the bitter-almond on his breath, cyanic acid, you know. That is——"

"Yes, I know!"

I was almost insane myself by now. I couldn't see a way out of this tangle. Here was White going off his head from his injuries and liable to charge the Crimson Chamber single-handed, while I must meet Sibley in the ring inside a few hours. The first thing to do was to get White in strong and competent hands, and my first thought was Mac, at the Post-Clinic.

"Come on, then," I said, rising and taking his arm. "Let's go in town and see what we can do about it. I know just the man to——"

"No you don't!" White pulled away suspiciously. "I know what I'm doin'. You go any old place! I go sleuthin' on my own hook—got that? I sat and twiddled my thumbs long enough. Here's where I get action or blow off a cylinder-head!" said White.

He started for the wrong door, the one of the women's ward, and I again caught his arm. At that he turned on me, eyes dilating, and after casting a quick look around, he whispered:

"Sh-h-h! No use wakin' up the whole outfit! You ride herd while I projeck around beyond them cottonwoods—got to find that water-hole before mornin' or the whole herd will be a millin'! Hear them steers now?"

He stared wide-eyed, as he listened to the hooting of the tugs on the river, and I had a sudden thought.

"That's right! But I beat you to it—found water not half-an-hour's ride over yonder. So you get some sleep. I'll call you if I see signs of a stampede. Honest! I found—we found it, didn't we, Riley?"

"Sure!" said Riley with emphasis. He had come into the office at my signal, and heard the last sentence only. "Doc and I found it—I'll go get——"

"There—you see?" I hurried to break in, "Riley can lead 'em to it if necessary! You hit the hay, quick!"

With the help of the loyal keeper I got White in bed and got a "hyp" into him when he wasn't looking.

"Hold him down if necessary until the dope gets in its work," I charged Riley. "I will send for Mac to come and get him. He's gone nutty from the clouts he got, and he's got to be held still. Put on the ice-cap, and for your life don't let him out of that bed except to go with Mac. Got it?"

"Sure! Dead easy. Will I put the jacket on 'im, 'f he raises——"

"Yes—anything to keep him."

Digitized by Google

I was about to rush off when Riley stopped me.

"One minute, Doc," he whispered rapidly, "Devery's got a word f'r you. He's in charge on the tiers!"

"No time! I got to——"

"None o' my business, Doc, but I'd see him, 'f I was you!"

I RAN down the iron stairs, swearing under my breath at the perverse luck. I was afraid I was too late already to do all that must be done and to get to the private gym where the swell boxing carnival was to come off. All the cream of New York's sporting contingent would be there to see Sibley assassinate an unknown. For, to avoid disappointing such an audience, White's indentity had been kept secret.

They had even gone so far as to import a Western professional, unknown in Gotham, to substitute for White if necessary. My offer to understudy the big ex-cowboy they evidently considered a joke.

This last was just the one thing needed to make me wild to get in the ring and have one swing at the insolent face of the Amateur Assassin. The name had been given him solely on his ring exploits, for in several secret encounters with amateurs and professionals he had never failed to put his man to sleep in the first round. He was said to have even met and fought a draw with "The Assassin," Stanley Ketchel, himself, whom he much resembled in build and temperament. But I never believed that, myself.

At the bottom of the stairs Devery was waiting, his happy moon-face in anxious eclipse. He drew me to the middle of the open space at the end of the tiers.

"It's only a date, Doc," he whispered. "Dan Wheeler said to tell you to be at the launch-landing at 2 A. M., tomorrow night — day - after - tomorrow morning, I should say—and to bring White with you. He said, 'Mr. Dillon won't show up for a day or two.' I wasn't hep. What good is that to anybody?"

"Never mind, Nice-Day! I'll be there, perhaps. So long!"

"No—wait, Doc! If you ain't there my hide will dry on the fence—you know that!" He was following me with worried eagerness.

"Sure-lee! That was when you took the hook."

I left him staring after me, and on the way to my room I said to myself.

"Now that wasn't funny—shows how badly scared and rattled I am, to say anything as flat as that—to a square old brick like Nice-Day Devery, too."

It was another of those high-tension happenings you never forget because they are driven into you when you are soft.

That is how it comes that I recall clearly every word I said to Devery on my way from my room. Since I was first going to see Mary Lloyd, I had changed to evening clothes, and found the acting Head Keeper in the main hall as I came down. With intent to make reparation I assured him:

"I'll be there, all right, Nice-Day. What's it for? And which landing—this side of Fifty-second Street?"

"Hs-s-st! not so loud Doc! He said, 'Launch-landing'. That's all I know. But you know Dan, Doc! It's no snipe-hunt, an' that's no lie. Say, you know how Dan looks when there's —— a-brewin'? Well, take it from Devery—curfew will ring a few tomorrow night."

"If dark prophecies will do it, it's a dead sure thing," said I. "I am sick of warnings and dark hints."

"Yeh?" he returned with mild reproach. "They wouldn't bother you with 'em, Doc, if they didn't give a ——!"

Coming from the champion joker of the Pen, this made me thoroughly ashamed of myself.

"Forget it, Devery, you know I appreciate it. But I've got my work cut out these days, and I rise to remark that—well, in plain English, I'm scared."

"You're all right, Doc!" Devery slapped me on the back, and it felt good. "I was losin' my nerve about you. Now I'll give any odds at all on you, to win or for place! You can't beat a man who'll own up he's scared—he forgets it in the ring!" And as he saw my astonishment he added: "Aha! Nice-Day ain't the mud-head he looks—what? Go to him, Doc! Rush him off his feet!"

And as he opened the big door for me, he gave me the touch on the back with his—

"Good luck!"

His words came to my mind when I was in the ring. It was only after several weeks that I learned that he knew absolutely nothing of the fight—that he was speaking figuratively.

Digitized by Google

X

"I KNOW I am late, but I couldn't help it," I told Mary Lloyd as she met me in the big entrance-hall.

She was dressed to go out and must have been waiting for a half-hour, yet she never showed anything but pleasure at my coming. As for me, I was always contented where she was, and the sight of her was clean delight. I had never got over flushing red when we met, and she always gave me a direct questioning look that seemed to ask for just that red blush of pleasure. Tonight she looked at me longer than usual and did not hear my excuse.

"James Corbin," she said accusingly, "you are troubled about something!"

"I've been hurrying, and I hate to be late," I said, trying to dodge the issue.

"What is it?" she smiled indulgently. "You may as well tell me, for you can't deceive a child. And I have known all day that something was coming."

"To you, you mean?"

"I don't know—to one or both of us." She kept her deep gaze on my face. "Are you going to be with Clark Sibley tonight or tomorrow?"

It was the first time she had mentioned him since our second meeting, and it seemed to hurt her to do it.

"Not alone. I shall see him—yes."

She never moved, but said slowly:

"Don't go anywhere alone—tonight or tomorrow. Promise?"

"I promise," I answered as seriously, but she still held me.

"Then I'll not croak any more. Do I annoy you much by fretting?"

"Annoy me! *You* annoy—*me!* Miss Mary Lloyd, what's the matter with you this evening? You look—like yourself!"

I caught my breath, and at that she seemed content and moved toward the door. If she had stood a moment longer with that seriously direct look on her face, I should have said something foolish, for I was excited and under high pressure. As it was I had to tell her:

"I don't think it's in you to nag, or say, 'I told you so!' I never met a person so stimulating or so restful, if that makes sense?"

"Tell me, James Corbin, do you have to force yourself to come to see me? Is it a hard thing to do?"

She stopped on the top step, and I turned to look up at her. She was so lovely and so appealing that I caught my breath between words.

"You know it—is my—greatest pleasure. Why do you ask?"

"Because—" she drew breath, as if relieved from a dread—"because I like to hear it, James!"

She slipped a light hand in my arm, and for half a block I was dizzy. I only got down to earth by making myself realize that she belonged to Castleman, and that I was a plain young doctor whom she gave the credit for helping her. I tried for safer ground by saying:

"I shall see Castleman tonight, too. So you see I shall be in good company."

I told myself I ought to be pleased at the color that came to her cheeks. She smiled up at me with:

"I think you can take care of—yourself, James. It isn't that, it is only that I have a presentiment or something, a feeling that something is hanging over one or both of us, and I feel that it is due tonight or tomorrow."

"I have had 'em"—I spoke at random, my heart thumping at the coupling of us together—"but they never come off; always miss fire."

"Mine never do," she said, and brightened bravely. "But I said I'd stop croaking, and I will. No man likes to be nagged—as you said yourself. Are we going to see Coghlan?"

And for the rest of the evening she was just herself, and made me forget what was ahead of me. From the very first the rich delight of being with her had always driven all else from my mind. As always, I took the good the gods gave and let the future look out for itself. The result was that when I said good night at her door and hurried down the avenue to meet Castleman at his rooms, I went as cheerfully as if I were going to look on at a delightful sport—could not realize that I was a lamb marked for slaughter. It was doubtless the reaction from the worry of the afternoon.

But Castleman soon dampened my spirits, all unwittingly. He was deliberately tying his tie before a mirror when I breezed into his suite, and he nodded to me in the glass.

"Easy to see where you came from—whom you came from, I should say," he said wistfully. "Must be you expect to

Digitized by Google

make a killing tonight. Have you got much on the big final bout? They're offering bigger odds than ever." He turned around anxiously. "How is White looking? Is he in good trim?"

"Have you been plunging on that fight?" I asked in alarm. "Got a lot of money up that White can stay four rounds?"

"I cert'nly have—why not? He can stay twice fou'—barrin' a chance blow like he got befo'!" The Kentuckian looked cool, but his talk betrayed him.

"I'll bet you have bet your last dollar," I ventured. "How are they betting anyhow? Is White's name known?"

"Hush, man! Nobody knows White from a jack-rabbit. They're offerin' from fou' to ten-to-one that the Invincible Demon will put out the Unknown in fou' rounds. That means any Unknown—anything at all on two laigs that we can stack up against Sibley! Bet my last dollar—why wouldn't I? Man, you just ought to heah 'em hollah. You'd put up yo' last red cent befo' you'd let 'em get by with it!"

Castleman stopped in his full stride to ask:

"But what's come to yo', man? You look like you'd heard bad news!"

"I have—better go hedge! Copper all those bets if you can. White's in bed with concussion of the brain, and I've got to take the lickin' myself."

For all his cool nerve, I expected to see him show some sign of excitement at the news that he stood a good chance to be ruined. Of late he had looked paler and more serious than usual, and his heavy losses at roulette had made talk even in New York.

When I fired the information at him point-blank, however, he only asked, "Is White in any danger?" and looked only kindly concerned.

"No. He'll be all right tomorrow or next day, and he will have his best-girl to nurse him. But don't you understand that you'll lose your whole pile on the Unknown? All bets will go, just the same, and I don't weigh as much as White within thirty pounds—to say nothing about condition, and—and punch!"

The pale, handsome face hardly changed its baffling smile by a shade. In fact the Kentuckian looked at me with indulgent amusement as he took a cigarette from a box on the table and threw one graceful leg over an arm-chair.

"That's forbidden—breaking training," I warned him sharply.

He only lighted a match and said between puffs:

"I have broken training! I take no more orders from Mr. Wheeler—I've no use fo' a man that treats a friend as he has treated you! But look hyeah, Co'bin! Don't *you* know yo' a betteh boxeh than White? And yo' style's mo' like Sibley's. I cert'nly wish I had mo' money to put up!"

His warmth was more than flattery—one of the things you can't forget or repay, and it made me turn a bright scarlet.

"You're a—a Southern gentleman," I stammered, "but that won't buy any meal-tickets. The cold facts are that I shall last something like half a minute, after the Amateur Assassin comes to me in earnest—and he has a reputation to keep up. You know his record?"

"Sure as yo' bo'n!" He looked at his watch, a beautiful and costly thing, and got up to put on his coat. "And I'd pawn this hyeh watch in one minute, only fo' a promise! You will keep yo' haid and stay as long as you can. White would try fo' a knockout and leave himself open. It's goin' to be a lovely scrap. Yo' goin' to let me be in yo' conneh'? Yo' boun' to!"

He stopped with one arm in his Inverness to look me in the eye, and I realized all in a flash what it would be like inside the ropes. I had been there before, but somehow this time I had a sudden attack of blue funk—right in Castleman's room, with him looking me in the eye.

"What is it, old man?" He shrugged his coat on and stepped up to me. "Are you sick?"

"No," I said weakly. "I—to tell the truth, I'm scared blue!"

"By gad!"

I never saw a handsomer man than Blain Castleman as he drew himself up and threw back his head, with his cameo profile and clear blue eyes in the white light of the incandescent. He slowly held out his hand, never wavering his steady look.

"Shake!" said he quietly. "I want to shake hands with a man who has courage enough to admit he's afraid. On my soul, I believe you'll lick Sibley. If I only had something to bet!"

"I'll lend you a nickel," said I.

He was Christian enough to laugh.

Digitized by Google

I DON'T seem to remember much of the preliminaries. I can see how Jem Taylor, the grizzled old ring-general, looked as he gave me good advice, while Castleman and Mac—I don't know how he came to be there, but there he was—got me into cambric running-drawers, low socks and rubber-bottoms. I know that I was rubbed down with cacao-butter, because the smell of alcohol made me sick, but I can't recall who rubbed me. While I was rubbed, I can see Taylor again, giving me more advice, and not a word of it reached my consciousness. I must have been in a lovely state.

Then I was in the strange private gym, all alight and filled with dress-suits. Then with a shock like an ice-water shower I realized that there were women in the crowd, and that in the sudden hush they were leveling lorgnettes and long-handled opera-glasses at me. I felt horribly naked—like a nightmare come true.

Sibley entered after I was in my corner, and there was a lot of kid-glove applause as he made his way down to the ring, smiling and bowing right and left. He wore a rich crimson bath-robe, and it came to me then that I had one on too—a green one. I had thought I was almost naked before, now I felt a sharp resentment that Sibley had appropriated my college color. Take it all in all—well, be charitable and call it stage-fright.

Taylor held the watch and Wheeler was referee. The arrangements moved on with indecent haste, it seemed to me, and some two persons were tying the gloves on me. My bath-robe was off now, and I didn't care.

"Time!"

My man was facing me now, and I was as comfortable as if I were in my bed. That did not even surprise me, for it had always been so. I was measuring Sibley's reach and noting at the start that he never looked where he was going to hit, but looked at the point he feinted at. It almost cost me a knock-out to learn it, but I jumped clean out of reach and his lightning left-swing fanned my nose.

I fervently thanked Providence I had not been put to sleep by the first blow, landed a straight left on his jaw as he pivoted, and he went to the rubber. I knew he was not out, and that he was taking his time to think as he got up slowly, ready-crouched to uppercut me, at the count of eight. That was why I did not follow up, but stepped back to let him get on his feet. But the fool crowd thought it was knightly courtesy and applauded. They were not prize-fight habitués, evidently.

Sibley came toward me, tottering groggily. He did it well, but his eyes shone bright and vicious through their narrowed lids, and I refused to be drawn.

He followed me into my corner and as I side-stepped under another of his smooth, lightning swings I heard Castleman murmur distinctly.

"Pretty work, old man! Use yo' haid!"

It gave me a warm glow of confidence, both the word of encouragement and Sibley's attempt to trick me, the latter showing that the Amateur Assassin already thought it worth while to use strategy. Now to last the round out.

If I could finish the three minutes on my feet Castleman would win enough to let him out whole, for the odds were two-to-one that I would sleep ten out of those one hundred and eighty seconds. But if you have never been there you have no notion what three minutes means.

I was circling past Sibley's corner now, and one of his seconds, a professional ex-champion, growled at him:

"Nothin' to it, Sib! Yellow all over. Kill 'm—now!"

Sibley leaped away from me to the center, with a light leopard-spring, and dropped his hands. At the same time he lost his assumed stupor and for one instant he waited, alert and easily smiling, while I cautiously followed to out-of-reach. Then he exploded.

No other word gives a hint of the way he flashed into action and became a human cyclone. His blows flickered and flashed through the air until I could both feel and hear the flirt of them passing, too quick for the eye. It was only by instinct that I ducked, parried, side-stepped, blocked and countered a perfect whirr of slashes, any one of them good for a trip to dreamland.

And there I cashed in the long hours of practise with my first boxing-teacher, a man of the old-school style who boxed as he fenced, and taught me to slide blows off my forearms in a way that is now a lost art. He had made me meet rushes like this, in slippers nailed to the floor. For a full minute I was back in the old storeroom at the Seminary hearing him caution, "Too wide! Too wide! A half-inch does it!" while he

Digitized by Google

bombarded me with a shower of punches until his wind gave out.

Only this man didn't slow up. He bored in harder and faster, with a speed and venom that would not be denied, until my half-inch of reach was all that saved me. I held him off at last with fist against his chest-muscles, shifting and side-stepping out of the corners, until a half-spent blow caught me on the mouth with a jarring flash.

I was on my knees when I clearly heard—"Four—five—six—" Then came Castleman's cool, clear voice, "Time enough—cover up!" And, "Nine——"

I was on my feet and caught an uppercut on my arm, curved to protect my face, for Sibley launched a young knockout the instant I had both feet on the rubber. I dropped into a clinch, still dizzy; Wheeler pushed us apart. I slashed out with my right at random, caught Sibley's chest full-weight and stopped him for long enough to clear my sight.

"Time!"

Sweetest word of the tongue of man.

I DROPPED on the canvas chair, arms outstretched on the ropes and head on Castleman's chest, closed my eyes and relaxed. While I was sprayed and fanned, rubbed, and my mouth rinsed, I heard some applause and learned afterward that it had been continuous for the last minute of the round.

"Man, yo' a wonder! Yo' broke all records and saved my bacon!" the Kentuckian was saying in my ear. "But hush-a-bye! That man Sibley sure is a cyclone. Can yo' hold 'im anotheh?" he whispered. "Save yo' breath. Nod yo' haid, yo' bull-terrier!"

I nodded several times—pure bluff, but I was coming stronger every instant.

I felt the Kentuckian's hands rubbing my neck as if I were a game-cock. At the call of time he put both hands to my back.

"Go to 'im, honey-boy!" he whispered hot in my ear, and tossed me to my feet.

I went to Sibley and he came to me. Both missed a straight left-drive and we clinched in the middle of the ring. Pushed apart, his farewell uppercut missed my chin by a shadow and he was at it again for a quick clean-up. Swings, drives and uppercuts came in smooth succession that veiled their fatal force and speed, and all the time he smiled as if he were enjoying himself. He was sure of the outcome, sure to get me inside the four rounds, and now he was making a show of me.

By now, however, I could feel the next move coming and did nothing but see to it that I was somewhere else. As he followed me up, he smiled and cast a glance now and then at friends outside the ring.

I began to take advantage of those flashes of inattention. Every time his eyes swung wide I drove a stiff punch to the chest-muscles or the deltoid. It did not look like much—was no grand-stand play—but if I could land a dozen such heavy jabs I would drop my hands and take his best smash, for it would rob his punch of all steam. Three or four times I got in on his driving-muscles, and then he got wise—too wise.

Again he looked away, but as I led for the chest he wormed sidewise with a lightning twist and flashed his wicked right-swing into my stomach. It had an up-slant, the reverse of the famous corkscrew blow over the liver; but if you've had your stomach banged against your spine, you know what happens. If you have not, words are useless.

Things began to darken before my eyes, but I dragged in a long breath with splinters on it and fell into a clinch as the Assassin came on to finish me. Over his shoulder I got a glimpse of Castleman signaling me to hug and hang on, and clung until forced to break away by Wheeler.

I managed to stagger between the terrific smashes Sibley launched one after another with no attempt to cover or feint; for he believed I was too groggy to see, and I kept up the deception.

Here chance favored me. I got the tag-end of one of his drives on the jaw, toppled forward on his shoulder and clung to him weakly; staggered away, reeling almost to the ropes. He was after me like a tiger. I timed my swaying to tilt forward as he came within reach, and snapped an uppercut to his wide-open face. He saw it coming in time to throw back his head, but it landed good and hard, and he dropped to one knee as he fell away, sidelong.

I can see the look of surprise and mounting rage on his face as he looked up at me, realizing that he had been tricked by my simple ruse. Simple is the word, for my look of ingenuousness—what Wheeler calls my open map—has stood me in good stead more than once. Standing over him now, fit and ready, I could not help smiling down

Digitized by Google

at him, and he sprang at me with all he knew and all he had in him.

No man could escape the whirlwind of swift swings and jabs, but they came too hot and fast for any of them to have lethal weight, so I met him as near half-way as I was able, and the rest of the second round was slugging pure and simple. We stood almost foot-to-foot in the middle of the ring and, as Mac put it, "Evehmo' lambasted each otheh," until the call of time and the referee's whistle sent us to our corners.

"Now yo' comin,' son!" It was Mac's bass rumble as he took his turn to freshen me up. "Yo' need anotheh couple o' good wallops to wahm yo' to yo' job. Mix it with 'im, boy! I sweah I believe yo' got the wind of him!"

My grin must have been a picture, with my swollen and cut lips. But it seemed to irritate Mac, as I could tell by the rasp of his heavy voice.

"Look 'yeah—" his rapid growl in my ear became vicious—"yo' go' let this hyeh slick tom-cat put it all oveh yo'? He's go' make a monkey of yo'. Look yondeh how he's laughin' at us all!"

In his corner Sibley was laughing, showing his small even teeth, his pale eyes gleaming through long narrowed lids as he glanced our way with contemptuous amusement. Evidently his seconds were urging him to put an end to the farce and put the yokel to sleep, for he nodded and sprang gracefully to his feet with a dangerous smile on his face as the call came.

"Time!"

At that moment Mac was hissing in my ear a hoarse whispered—

"Walk into the snaky devil—leave 'im both sides o' the road!"

Castleman bent low to whisper on my other side:

"Don't let him draw you, he's poison mad now. Stick this round out and we'll love you to death!"

And both Southrons tossed me to my feet.

WE CAME together in the middle of the ring as if snapped by rubber-bands, each landing a neck-blow that jarred us to our heels, and were at it where we left off.

Fired with a fierce itch to smash the insolent, smiling face before me, I drove every punch home with my weight behind it, and let my head take care of itself. The result was little damage to the small elusive face that swayed and ducked as it smiled and mocked at me, while those smooth-whipping swings and uppercuts of Sibley's battered and sliced me to a pulp. Inside a half-minute I was half stunned and bleeding from nose and mouth, while Sibley was still cool and smiling, taking his time to pick his spot for a knockout.

I felt the fatal dullness blanketing my senses and my limbs, and I knew what it meant. In a glove-fight you feel no pain after the first blow or two. Then you get warmed right, feel only a jarring shock when you're hit, and only know how much you're damaged by the numb feeling that slowly robs you of your "pep." Your thoughts and your punch slow up, then you get it in the neck or jaw, and night shuts down on you.

It was no new thing to me, and with the realization that I was going, came sudden panic. I mustn't quit like this, with a lot of good punches left in me! Devery's words, repeated by Mac, "Walk into 'im!" came back to my blunted consciousness and reminded me of the hand-over-hand piston-action rush with which I had so surprised the ring-veteran Taylor that he had pronounced it, " 'Arder to stop than Old John L's 'one-two-three rush'!"

Mine was a one-two-three-four succession of right-and-left drives to the head, chest, stomach, head—then over and over again, walking in with each second blow and working the piston action faster and faster. I can recommend it to any man with good wind and chest-muscles, who will practise.

This was what came back to me as I saw Sibley setting himself for his "hay-maker," and with it came the thought that he would not be on the lookout for a repetition of my simple ruse of feigning weakness, now I was groggy and bleeding streams. It takes time to tell what flashed into my mind in a wink.

Dropping my arms, I swayed backward as his drive came slanting up to my jaw, and let the smashing force of it slide past. I got just enough of it to serve as excuse for tottering back—back—back to the ropes, with Sibley after me like a wolf, and clinging to them for support. A-quiver with eagerness to land, he swung a savage hook that went slithering past my ear as I slid sidelong to the floor.

Digitized by Google

He waited for me to get up, standing crouched and ready to smash me the instant I had both feet on the floor and no other part touching.

Turning on all-fours, I raised my hands free and pitched forward in a running-fall, as if too weak to get my balance. When Sibley came skipping after to whip an uppercut to my face, I once more ducked it by dropping flat on my stomach. And in his eager rush he tripped over me to his hands and knees.

That was my chance. Leaping to my feet I dashed the blood from my eyes and chose my distance carefully. Starting from well back in my own corner I timed a short run to meet Sibley as he came on, already in full swing of my right-left-right-left piston drive, and the fourth punch caught him fair in the mouth. It was the first good blow I had landed since the punch at the start-off. It whipped back his head and stopped him, but I never let up in the steady, machine-like right-left-right-left as I followed up and kept him on the go.

From the loss of blood both my sight and head were clearing, and I saw I had him confused and off-balance for the first time. No one can know the deep thrill of delight that was almost a pain, as I realized that I had him stopped, but I knew he was only stopped for the moment.

I had the sense to aim every drive for the body now—his head was too slippery, small and dodgy—and slammed into his "slats" and chest-muscles, with body-swing in every punch. He was driven back—back—trying desperately to side-step or block, but kept going and off-balance by the heavy body-punches until, near the ropes in his corner, he dropped into a clinch to avoid punishment.

However, I was happy too soon. Winded by the rush, I relaxed an instant in the clinch. Sibley sprang away with a left-hook to the stomach that popped the breath out of me, and came back with a rush that made mine look slow by comparison. His left was a terror—afterward I learned that he was left-handed from birth—and he landed it on my lower face until I clinched.

Three times this was repeated until I was cautioned for holding, and the next time I got a right-swing that sent me down, to get up at the count of eight, so dull and dizzy that it was easy to knock me down before I was fairly on my feet. The end of the round I don't remember at all. I was on my feet, but unconscious so far as concerned my senses.

"Man, yo've had a plenty and fought like a tiger! What good in keepin' at it?" It was Castleman's voice in my ear, and my sight was clearing so that I could see women leaving the place—one was being carried out in a faint. Castleman was talking a lot.

"They're all fo' yo' now, an' shoutin' to the referee to stop it! Will I tell 'em it's all over?"

Before I could protest, comes an emissary from the opposite corner—a soft-voiced young man with a heavy forelock in his eyes. He spoke with a contemptuous smirk at my battered appearance.

"Mister — er — Castleman, Mr. Sibley says your man has put up a good fight, and he is reluctant to put him out. He is willing to call the next round off, all bets paid on the basis of your man having stayed the full four rounds. You will see it is only generosity—for this man can't last a half-minute—and to stop the punishment. Your man will get the five thousand, of course, anyway!"

"What five thousand?" I blurted on the instant.

The soft-headed youth smiled his sickly smile some more and still addressed Castleman and twiddled his watch-fob.

"Your man seems up to a joke still, but we can hardly believe he took the three rounds of punishment for any other reason but to get the standing reward offered by Mr. Sibley to any man who would last three rounds. But what is your answer?"

Castleman looked at me and I knew what he was thinking. He was recalling White's quixotic scheme of proving to Mary Lloyd that Sibley was human, by whipping him—or trying. But to allow Sibley to pose as the knight magnanimous would be nothing gained, and the offer was insulting.

"Look here!" I sat up suddenly. "Talk to me! I am no prize-fighter—didn't know there was any offer of five thousand for three rounds. But I am not out—yet! Likewise I am not sure Sibley can put me out — yet! Not in this or any other round——"

I suppose it must have looked ridiculous, coming from my slit and blackened lips, but the smile that passed around the circle of young bloods, crowding up to the ropes to listen, drove me out of bounds. That five thousand, moreover, didn't mean anything

Digitized by Google

to me—yet. I stood up, feeling as good as new and with my ears roaring with anger as I gritted out:

"He has got to show me! And I will put up that five thousand, even money, that he can't do it in this round or the next!"

"Perhaps you'd like the small end of a ten-to-one bet that you don't send *him* to the floor for the count—after this round?" softly suggested the soft one, and some of the circle snickered while others hissed and frowned.

"Yes, if I last this round I'll have ten thousand, and I'll put it all up at that odds that I get him in the fifth!"

The sum of a hundred thousand was big enough to command respect even in that sycophantic circle, and they stopped grinning. The herald of the "Opposition" went back to report, and there was much hustling in the other corner, while Mac whispered:

"That's the hammer! Bluff 'em out! And, ma-an, stick this round out. Can yo' do it?"

"Certainly!"

I knew it looked like pure bluff, but I got up at the call of time and went in with a show of assurance. I honestly thought Sibley's punch was weakening and that I could take another three minutes of his best. But I didn't deceive myself about *getting him.* I would fight one round at a time, and I hoped to land a few more of those weakening body-blows before I got my sleep-wallop.

It seemed it was a mistake all through. Sibley came at me as if he had never seen me before—as if he were perfectly fresh. His first drive put me down for seven seconds, and I went down three times more, almost as fast as I could get on my feet, without touching him once. More by luck than skill, I reeled out of reach so persistently that he was winded by his efforts to get at me.

When I got my sight clear he was panting with every swing, following cautiously in fear of another feigned collapse. I managed to keep my feet, even do a little slugging of my own, and the round ended amid some genuine applause from the crowd, now pressing the ropes.

In the interval before the fifth round I was half asleep, didn't know who was holding or sponging me or what was said, but I was conscious that there was much excitement. Somebody tried to break into the ring and stop the thing, and there were a few private scraps started. I simply relaxed and breathed deeply, my wind coming stronger at every breath.

I WAS up at the call of time and facing Sibley. He was smiling as ever, showing his little white teeth, but I noted that his breath was short and that his first blow lacked steam. I got every ounce of it and, although it knocked me down, I did not lose myself, but took full nine seconds to get up.

"Now let's see!" I muttered to myself as I stood up and staggered out of reach. "Here's where we totter inside the next one!"

And as the swing went around my neck and its force toppled me sidelong, I put a hand to the floor, rolled backward and over to my hands and knees, and again took the full nine counts to get upright.

Instead of reeling away from the savage hook that time, I dived into it and drove my right to the stomach, followed it by a left to the ribs, and Sibley had to stop for breath.

Twice more I reeled and went down, each time getting up to drive in a body-blow from hands-and-knees, thus getting all my weight, body and legs, behind each battering-ram smash to ribs or stomach. Such blows take the life out of a man more than a hundred hooks to the face.

Sibley, never suspecting a third repetition of a childish deception, came at me again, gasping until his neck-muscles sprang out like ropes under their folds of skin, and set himself with all care for the finishing smash. Hands hanging, I reeled into it, waited until it was well launched, then sprang aside easily, turned half-around, using the whirl as a body-swing, and drove my right to the jaw-angle—*crash!*

Sibley still lay with face upturned to the strong white glare when Wheeler counted:

"Ten—and out! Dr. Corbin wins by a knockout!"

I turned to walk steadily to my corner, after Wheeler had held up my right hand in proper token of victory, and holding out both gloves to Mac and Castleman I said:

"It took a lot of silly flopping around and rolling on the floor—but I did it! Now I want lots of hot-water bathing to get my face so I'll know myself."

Digitized by Google

Both my seconds looked at me as if I were risen from the dead, both stood open-mouthed for a second or two before they got their breath and hoisted me on to their shoulders. I had to fight to get down, and to get away from the hands of those who claimed they had seen my game all along and wanted to congratulate me. But Sibley's professional second came to me to say:

"Good head-work, bo! You got the steady nerve that makes champs. Better get into the game!"

But it was what Wheeler said, while I was sopping hot water on my swollen features and my two seconds were waltzing around me in crazy delight, that had most meat in it. He appeared suddenly behind me to whisper hoarsely:

"Don't get a swelled head—you've done it now! Sibley will be dead poison from now out—keep away from him tomorrow, and from me. But let nothing but sudden death keep you away from the launch landing the next morning at two-thirty! It will be the big show! Are you hep?"

He was whispering, so I nodded without looking around, and he vanished as noiselessly as he had come.

When Sibley was dressed for the street he came to congratulate me, with his smile in perfect working-order. No man would guess to look at us that I had won such a savage boxing-bout, or that he had taken part in one at all. He bore no mark or scratch, and seemed to bear no rancor as he said:

"All honor to the victor! I was outfought and out-generaled. The body-blows did it. We shall meet again!"

I looked at his smile and felt chilly as I said—

"Many times, I hope." And I took his limp hand.

"No—only once—" still smiling—"since I go away for good tomorrow night." He turned at the door to wave a graceful hand and say, "Until then!"

"Snaky as ever!" Mac commented, sobered at once. "A blame' shame he don't go tonight. I got to go back to White. This sure will cure him. So-long!"

He came back after reaching the street to add:

"Cohbin—yo' heah me! You keep way away from that cuss—he sure is poison—an' stick to Dan!"

XI

THE twenty-four hours that followed were crowded with rush and excitement, but a third of them were blank for me. After I had got my face presentable, I could barely keep awake and be civil to strangers pressing flattery and congratulations on me, until Castleman took me home and put me between his sheets. He kept guard while I got eight hours of dead sleep, then I had to hurry back to the Island for sick-line.

More jubilant congratulations and petting, and then came a summons from Mr. Dillon who met me alone in the glass-and-granite office, with a face pale and haggard. He feared I had not got the message for the following night's appointment.

"I was summoned to Washington to give testimony before a secret commission about this very matter," he told me like a man who cannot believe his senses, but fears he will not wake from a nightmare. "They are thoroughly aroused—convinced that there is grave danger of international complications, even of a horrible war that would make this affair with Spain look like play, if this leak is not stopped. That is the expression that Senator —— himself used in my presence!"

The Warden's eyes looked at me as if I were a ghost as he went on:

"He may be in New York himself tonight, and I am told you will be one of the small party that will make an attempt to catch the unknown spy. Whether this appointment for 2.30 A. M. is the expedition in question or only a ruse, I do not know, but it is my part to make you realize that nothing must interfere. Ab-solutely nothing must prevent your doing your part. And so far as I know, you are simply to be at that landing at the hour mentioned. Understand?"

"Yes," I answered. "I shall be there."

I was still enwrapped in the mantle of half stupid content that follows complete muscular and nervous fatigue—still feeling as comfortably drowsy as a cat before the fire.

But events came piling hard and heavy upon me, until I was aroused to a sense of horror in the air.

To begin with, I was hustling through my hospital routine, and almost ready to start for the Fifth Avenue residence to

Digitized by Google

make my call on Mary Lloyd, when her Uncle John 'phoned me she had gone to visit her schoolmate and my cousin, Mrs. Col. Jordan, at Fort Wadsworth. But he added:

"Come to the house, however, at once! You are needed—badly needed—will you come?"

"I am coming—now!"

And I started with the professional coolness a doctor must learn early, or be useless forever.

That interview was too painful to repeat. Mary Lloyd's uncle and guardian was in a mood that would have been suicidal in one with less bull-dog grit. He was within a few dollars of bankruptcy, and if that fact leaked out he would be many thousands on the other side. Therefore he dared not trust any man with his troubles.

"James, I have told you—as one of the family and a physician—of our trouble. So you know I have lost all Mary's fortune except a necklace worth two hundred thousand—forced-sale price. I have not the face to ask her for a further loan, but half that amount would tide me over, and that is the only chance of getting back for her the balance of her inheritance. You see how it is. She has the utmost confidence in you, and would do absolutely anything you advise. Will you help us out, James?"

I couldn't help thinking that his cousinship by marriage had not lain very heavily on his conscience until lately; also I saw his gorgeous presence as he lorded it over us country folk up in the Green Mountains, contrasted with his wretched appeal of today. "Help us out" meant "Ask Mary to pawn her necklace to save me." But at that instant I saw his hands—lean and age-hollowed—trembling, and I was ashamed of myself.

"How soon, at the latest, must the money be in your hands?" I asked.

"Before the opening time, the day after tomorrow," he answered, and I thought he was about to faint from excitement and anxiety.

"I am quite sure it can be arranged before then," I said quietly.

It was a new and sweet taste of the power of money—here I could handle this thing by myself with last night's winnings, if need be. To stop his expression of gratitude, for it was painful, I said:

"Can I 'phone to Miss Mary from here? I want to see her at once."

"You certainly can. I'll call up the Colonel!"

He was himself again, and I was watching the transformation as he hailed Col. Jordan with his usual jocose cordiality:

"Hello! Is this Frederick? Why haven't we seen you since Christmas, young man? —— Well, don't let it occur again, sir! Even if you are ashamed of your wife's relatives, there is such a thing as an appearance of civility. Will you please ask Mary to come to the 'phone a moment? —— Mary — Mary Lloyd! —— She — What? Stop your joking, sir! Yes—yes! She left here about ten with Miss Stone who saw her aboard the ferry. She intended to spend the night with your—— You what? Please repeat that slowly—I did not get it.—— *You have not seen her*—you—My God!"

HE DROPPED back in the big chair and wiped the small drops from a forehead as white as that of a corpse. I was out of my chair now, holding myself by an effort to keep from snatching the 'phone from his shaking hand.

"Aren't you going to notify the police?" I almost shouted. "Where is Miss Stone? Tell the Colonel to start the hunt from that end! Why was she allowed to go a step alone? Get things moving! I beg your pardon, but ——"

"Keep perfectly calm. Listen to reason," came clear and thin from the ear-piece in his hand. The old gentleman stared in my face with eyes wide and terrified as the even voice went on: "This is not advice—it is an order—a command from the Crimson Chamber! We have taken the liberty of tapping your wire, but make no move to find us—make no move to find Miss Lloyd *until tomorrow.* If you do, she will disappear, and tomorrow's papers will announce that 'John Barton, bankrupt, commits suicide!' Do you understand, or shall I repeat it?"

"I understand." Shaking as with an ague chill, the terrified man's voice was hardly more than a whisper. "But she will not be harmed—will return tomorrow?"

After a short pause the voice answered deliberately.

"She will be properly cared for. You are in no position to make terms—one word will ruin you. That is all!"

There was a click, then Col. Jordan's voice:

Digitized by Google

"Hello—hello! Is this Uncle John? Somebody cut us out. What was it about? Mary? Shall I call up the ——?"

"It's all right, Frederick! We have got word—I should say—it was a mistake. Mary is—at home. Good-by! —— Yes, quite sure. All right—good-by!"

"But I will call the police!" I reached for the 'phone. "They have no hold on me, and I'd do it in spite of ——"

"Not here, James!" He pushed my hand aside. "You don't know what you're saying, my boy! I didn't tell you all I know about the Crimson Chamber. I blush for my city when I say that you might as well put a bullet through your head as notify the police, now! You would go out of that door, James—" he leaned forward to point to the rich portal in question, and whispered—"and you would never be heard from again! That I know!"

Again the click, and again from the thing in his hand came the voice:

"Quite correct, John Barton. But it would be as well to hang up, or put your hand over the receiver. You will be held responsible for any leak—and we are too busy to be annoyed. Remember the bitter-almond smell and the chute to the river!" The voice grew faint and slower. "This is final!"

The ear-piece clattered on the desk and John Barton's head nodded on his chest. He had fainted.

XII

"MAC, May I speak to you a minute?" I called the duck-clad House Surgeon from a chat with two dainty nurses at the end of the child's surgical ward at the Post-Clinic.

He came out into the corridor.

"How is White?" I asked hurriedly, and Mac's dark face lighted lantern-like.

"Well enough to get married and hit the high spots for the Rockies!" he rumbled. "I roll in after the fight—he was boun' I should go and tell him about it—at four G. M. and go straight to his room. Dawg my Cats! Hyah's Bre'r White jammin' stuff into a suitcase an' lookin' fit to fight fo' his life.

"He says, 'just in time to witness the ceremony!' An' doggawn 'f he hadn't got the license two days befo'—befo' he even had asked the gyerl! Hyeh comes Miss Kelley and Miss Jenkins all dolled up, gray travelin' suit an' all, and we have a weddin'-breakfast at Stanley's befo' they take the train fo' the West! I neveh have had my shoes off at all! White left a message fo' you—and a package."

"Wait!" I stopped him as he moved toward his room to get the package. "I can get it some other time. What I want to know is: have you seen Castleman today? He hasn't been to his rooms—Miss Lloyd has disappeared—everything is in a crazy mess! Mac, if anything has happened to that girl——"

"You come with me, son!"

Mac laid a steady hand on my arm, and I seemed to be having a chill myself as he gently forced me to go to his room with him. When we were alone he got me into a chair and lighted his pipe.

"Now yo' simmeh down an' listen to yo' Uncle Mac! This hyeh message was from the little Jap Count—remembeh him?"

"Of course, the one who——"

"Ex-actly! The one who— Let 'er go at that! He shows up at the weddin' breakfast and does the propeh thing as smooth as oil—then he gets White and me alone to tell White he has done his part—White has—an' all; so he's free to make his getaway, an' everything will be all right. To prove it the little Jap gives White two boxes. White opens 'em, and what d'yo reckon's in 'em? A——"

"Diamond ring and a necklace!" I broke in. "How did he get the jewels—and what did he say about them?"

"Said not a blame thing. Only tells White to get west of the Mississippi, and gives 'em his blessin'. White hands 'em over to Mrs. W.—the prettiest, I mean—an' she takes him one side and gives him his awdehs. Presen'ly hyeh comes White an' gives me a package fo' yo' to open tomorrow. He says, 'Tell Cohbin it's from us, fo' lickin' the cuss fo' me!' And Mrs. W. says, 'We hope he will know what to do with it by tomorrow!' I don't reckon yo' know any mo' now than you did befo'."

Mac grinned at me cheerfully.

"What's all this got to do with that girl, Mac?" I had not got half the meaning of Mac's words. I was seeing Mary Lloyd, struggling with hired yeggs, dead, or worse. "While we are wasting time here——"

"I'm comin' to that." Mac laid a hand on my knee. "We-all saw White an' his

Digitized by Google

bride on to the train, an' the little Jap asks me to let him take me to the hospital in his closed cyah. Who d'yo' reckon is in the cyah in the dark? Dan Wheeler, by golly! He and the Jap talks right freely.

"'Now White gets away from him,' says Wheeler, 'he will just natch'ally have to wind up in a hurry. He's about ripe anyhow,' he says. 'I have got the Kentucky blue-blood muzzled, if we can keep the Doc from goin' up in the air. He's the one that will froth at the mouth the worst,' Dan says. 'That's the —— of this Cupid-business—it'll gum any game at all!' he says.

"And the Jap says, 'He must not be permitted to interfere.' And the both of 'em tell me to grab yo' if I have a chance—to keep yo' out o' mischief until tonight, no matteh what happens. So I reckon yo' betteh just lay low, son!"

"So you're in the conspiracy? I thought you were talking an awful lot, for you!" said I bitterly. "What have you got against the girl, or Castleman, or me? Put yourself in Castleman's place, or mine. After the way he has treated me, I'd look well lying down without making an effort to help them—even to find them—now wouldn't I?"

Mac stood, hands in pockets, between me and the door, his big towsled black head dropped forward so he looked at me through bushy brows. He said no word in answer, and I was at the end of my patience.

"Mac," I said as quietly as I could, "you mean well, no doubt, but I'm going to look for them—" I stepped forward—"right now!"

Mac's head turned a bit in a listening attitude. He stepped aside. A quick, light step sounded in the hall, the door opened noiselessly and Dan Wheeler entered. He closed the door behind him and nodded to Mac at the same time.

"Good leather!" he said, and his voice had the note, deeply resonant, it took on in times of danger or stress. He turned to me, green eyes hostile and keen. "Got to do your ——est to queer us, what? Well—shoot it!"

"What about Castleman and Mary Lloyd?" I blurted like a big child.

"They're where——"

He shut his cruel lips tight, seemed to hold himself an instant, then raised a gloved finger to level it at me and asked hardly above a whisper—

"Doc, did I ever lie to you?"

"No!" I felt all anger oozing out.

"Listen—they're safe! Raise a holler and you'll croak them both, and you'll be apt to go after 'em. Now go back to the Pen, and be on the float at 2.30 A. M. You got your orders!"

For a space we never stirred.

"I'll do it!" I said with relief. "Now I have your word, Dan. But why do you—use that tone with me, with only Mac to hear us?" I swallowed hard.

"Because you carry an open map!" I could feel those eyes, boring and benumbing, as he cracked out, finger still leveled: "No open-face amateur will gum this game. Get that! Be at the float at Two-thirty, with fear-o'-Dan-Wheeler griping your guts, or all ——'s out for noon!" And he was gone.

When I looked about for Mac, I found he was standing at the window, back to me, and looking down into the street.

"Mac," I at length got out, "what d'you suppose would happen if I, or you and I, did go down to that square hole under the pier—knocked three times—then twice ——"

I was fishing clumsily to find out what he knew, and Mac gave me a surprise.

"Then once mo'!" He broke in without turning his head. "Not any fo' Uncle Mac! Oh-h no! And how 'bout this hyeh 'Awdeh That Ain't So'?" He faced about grimly and shook his lion's mane. "Son, I am too young to die!"

I had never heard Mac mention the powerful Nameless Order—never known that he too was a member of its outer circle—and that was not strange. The humble member of the powerful brotherhood knows next to nothing to tell, and what he knows sounds so improbably silly, there is little incentive to disobey and talk. He neither likes to be laughed at, nor wishes to disappear off the earth. Moreover, even now, when I am no longer bound by word or conscience, I hate to speak of the Order—feel a strange reluctance to think about it when I am alone. 'Tis a thing uncanny and best forgotten.

"I had almost forgotten it, for the time," I admitted, and walked the floor uneasily. "I've been badly muddled in my wits lately, don't know if I'm awake or dreaming half the time, and no wonder. I am sick—sick of being told how big this game is we're

Digitized by Google

playing—sick of being told to sit down and wait. *Wait!* Can you see Castleman waiting, if he knew Mary Lloyd was missing? No game is big enough to be worth the price! Now I am to play with my fingers until tomorrow morning. Am I a child or an idiot to be treated like this? Mac—that girl——"

Of a sudden I felt like making a fool of myself. Through mist I saw Mac put on his soft hat. His strong hand on my arm, he rumbled low and comforting:

"Uh-huh, I see, son. Come with me. I'll walk yo' around a spell and yo'll feel betteh!"

He led me down the hall and stairs to the street, where he continued his quieting counsel.

"Yo' boun' to do like Wheeler tells yo'. He knows his business, an' this hyeh Awdeh. You know it does the business, if yo' don't know anything else. What?" In answer to a startled look from me he said: "'S all right, son. I got awdehs to talk, and to walk yo' around a spell an' cool yo' off!"

Walk me around he did. But I didn't see things he called to my attention; I was seeing Mary Lloyd. Let's don't recall the rest of that afternoon and evening. May I never put in such another!

The War in Europe, which has started since this story was begun, brings to mind one question I asked Mac on the street as we raced about town.

"Mac, d'you believe any great civilized nation would dare make use of such information as they say is leaking out? It would mean war—war in the Twentieth Century!'

"I heah ——" he named a national celebrity— "is on from Wash'nton to find out fo' sho' if the Main Guy is pinched. He's hyeh, anyhow, fo' I saw him myself—that looks like theah's somethin' in it!" Mac made another effort to distract me by a sweeping gesture toward the theater-crowd, filling Broadway with color, perfume and bright gayety. "Look yondeh. What yo' reckon this hyeh bunch o' gold-tooth swells 'd do, if a few bombs spattehed Broadway all oveh Manhattan?"

"I know what would happen if you suggested the possibility of it," said I. "You'd be put in the insane ward at Bellevue."

But I remember that for a few moments I watched the rich spectacle of the spending-center of America, thinking what it would look like after a few bombs had spattered these overfed and pampered humans all over Broadway, and I pinched myself in the hope that I should wake up from this nightmare. It was all too absurd for serious thought—the very extravagance of the horror itself brought reaction. It was soon after this that I turned a sane regard on Mac.

"It's all over now, Mac! I'll go back to the Pen and wait until it's time to go down to the launch landing. Tomorrow we'll find we've been making fools of ourselves, and that it was all a false-alarm—a mare's nest!"

"Uh-huh!" said Mac, and slouched around the next corner to strike a bee-line for the Post-Clinic. The job of quieting me being finished, he saw no point in wasting more time.

"Good night, Mac!" I shouted, and a roll-necked, fat man cursed me for treading on his feet.

"Night!" Mac rumbled over his shoulder and disappeared.

I started for the East River at Fifty-second Street, already sleepy from reaction, and chuckling inanely at the fancy of the fat man waddling for the nearest cellar at the explosion of the first Broadway bomb.

XIII

AT 2 A. M. all the world is sick and shivery. It's a poor time to lead a forlorn hope or start on stark adventure. Squatted on my heels in the lee of a corner-pile, on the float where the Doctor's launch landed in daytime, I looked across the dark water to the city's lights and wished myself well out of the whole business. A few months earlier, when I was new to New York and its ways, such gloomy prophecies as I had heard from all sides would have passed over my head.

Since I had lived in this little despotism, however, since I had seen the wheels of government by graft go around and grind human souls, I had been chastened. Kennedy's words kept sounding in my head—

"Whativer ye're up to—don't do ut!"

This expedition in the dark on deep water did not charm me. I was no distance swimmer, and I pictured varied disaster by shipwreck in the hours just ahead. Meanwhile, I kept an eye on the lone light on the

Digitized by Google

masthead of the Doctor's launch, dancing at its moorings across at Fifty-second Street. For I had conceived the notion that Wheeler would seize that little old craft for his great venture. I had no cause to think so, except that it would be just like him to do it.

I was looking hard at the wavering masthead light, to make sure for the hundredth time that it was not moving against the tide, when a long, low monster slid alongside the float's edge—so near I could almost reach it. There was a rumble of well-oiled steel, the throb of a submerged exhaust slowed and ceased with a hissing of steam, and between me and the city lights loomed a square of blackness, head-high.

This opened a flap that flooded me with light and the smell of warm engine-oil. Wheeler's slightly hoarse voice growled—

"Flop in here, Doc!"

And as I blundered through the tarpaulin opening, stiff with cold, the famous cracksman saved me an icy ducking by a sharp haul on my collar, commenting meanwhile:

"Handy's a camel on roller-skates! Take your feet out of the engine, Doc, and get acquainted with our surprise-party. Know any o' this bunch?"

Blinking in the sudden light, I first recognized the boiler-plate and engine of the *Scat.* I had last ridden in her when I was tutoring her owner, Hank Seton, for Sheff; and seated on the gridiron at my feet with his feet in the engine-pit was Hank himself. He was man-grown, almost as fat as ever, and his right hand was on the throttle-steering combination, so that he reached up his left to me with his own square-jawed grin.

"Glad to see you again, Mr.—pardon me, Doctor Corbin! This is something like the real thing, by Jiminetty!" And he clapped his eyes to a sort of cone-shaped tube, like a megaphone, as he asked Wheeler, "Do I head for Pier Twenty-three straight?"

Wheeler took a look for himself before answering, and my attention was switched by a soft, low voice behind me.

"I'm only a passenger, but I still occupy my portion of space. Here's a better seat, Doctor Corbin!"

I whipped around to shake the soft hand of Del Howe, only son of America's greatest diplomat, John Howe, and another of my boys at St. Peter's. On the one comfortable leather cushion in the improvised tarpaulin cabin he lounged, lax and graceful as of yore, smiling his bright baffling smile with which he would accompany the dainty witticisms that would sear your soul and stick like a branding-iron. As he made room for me he offered me his elegant cigarette case with the easy, chatty remark:

"We make a picturesque job-lot of sleuths, not, Doctor Corbin? Hank, now, is realizing his ambition and treading the trail of his hero, Sherlock Holmes! I always recognized the subtle depth of Hank's deductive logic. His polished Mephistophelian penetration and lightning} versatility early stamped Hank for a career as a sleuth-hound of Justice."

"Make as good a Dick as you do diplomat, by Gorry!" muttered Hank placidly. "I can run an engine, anyway!"

"And turn off your face before it slops over," added Wheeler drily.

"A very palpable 'it!" In rising to bow with hand on heart, Howe bumped his head on the boards supporting the top. "Ouch! That hurt!"

He rubbed his head and snapped at Seton with childish irritation:

"That's your fault, Hank! This box isn't big enough—and I can't breathe in here. We don't have to suffocate, to save New York from the Goth and the Vandal, by Heck! I am going to have an air-hole. Gimme a knife, somebody!"

"Sit down and shut up," said Wheeler gently. "I've no time to spank kids, but—I wouldn't play fool any more—not now!"

"Very severe man, the Chief!" Howe whispered to me in a stage aside, "and he must be obeyed. Friend of yours?"

He raised his expressive eyebrows and cast at Wheeler a side-glance of exaggerated fear.

"Yes—to all three statements—very much so!" said I. "And I'd suggest that you act on 'em. This is no picnic. How came you are here, anyhow?"

"Just what my father said," Howe answered soberly, "and when he says a situation is serious, the situation is serious! You may have——"

"Yes, I know that. What else did he say?"

"He said that —— had a small flock of warships loafing around within striking-distance of New York; and that they were

Digitized by Google

only waiting for a chart of the mines and things to—" he paused to light another cigarette and to tantalize me, well knowing that the civilized world held its breath when John Howe said his say on matters international—"to make some excuse for slipping into the harbor and forcing a big indemnity out of Uncle Sam. He said they'd not hesitate one hour after they were in possession of the information that would make it safe to sail in!"

Howe's rare sobriety meant that he was telling the dangerous truth. It took something appalling to make him talk sense, but even he, accomplished liar though he was born, would not dare misquote his world-famous sire.

For the first time I felt the fearful importance of our work, and I looked at Wheeler with a new realization of the power that was in the man. Howe followed my glance and with his unwholesome intuition guessed my thought.

"Yes! He's the man they're bankin' on down there in Wash'nton—and I'd like to get a hook on one handful of what he'll drag down out of the job! He's to have the say as to what is to be done with the plunder!" Howe was speaking in an awe-struck whisper. "They say the Arch-Spy has stuck to a fortune that would make him a second Rothschild if he could get away with it, and our friend Wheeler is the only man who can find the man or the money. That's why he can make his own terms, namely, the whole thing! He gets the *geld* if he lands the traitor. Clark Sibley himself told me so."

"Sibley, what's he to do with it, and where do you come in?" I blurted.

"Why, didn't you know? Sibley is the head of the bunch of millionaires who have contributed to help Uncle Sam pay the expenses of this hunt. No rich man is safe in New York until the Crimson Chamber fiend is landed, so they're glad enough to pay the bill. I'm just the small boy sent by Uncle Sam to see what happens. But Senator —— himself is waiting somewhere, placed by your friend Wheeler, to dance like a hen on a hot griddle until we bring him proof that the job is done. Oh, you're in swell company, all right!"

And he smiled his boyish, happy smile, as if he were speaking of a theater-party. At this point Wheeler turned away from the lookout-cone to fix on the talkative youth the look that had put fear of death into many strong men.

"Son, you talk too much with your mouth. Stand by with a boat-hook to make one more landing!" he said quietly.

"Aye—aye, sir!"

Howe jumped with promptness incredible. We pulled alongside a float I never located, so absorbed had I been in what Howe was telling me. The flap was again lifted and Wheeler pulled in out of the darkness—Castleman!

AS HE blinked and got his bearings, like a man dropped from another planet, I started to introduce him to Howe and Seton. He greeted them with his usual sober courtesy, but turned from Wheeler with face marble-hard to ask me:

"Doctor, have you been to Miss Lloyd's home? I—was prevented from calling there today. I somehow feel uneasy about her. Can you tell me anything——"

"Yes, she disappeared this morning!" I burst out. "Her uncle 'phoned——"

"Pardon me, gentlemen," the Kentuckian interrupted, "but I shall have to ask you to excuse me. Don't cast off there, please, I must——"

"Too late now! We're ten rods from the landing," said Hank, and he looked up at the Kentuckian with ready sympathy.

"Then I'll swim for it!"

Castleman had his coat half off when Wheeler laid a hand on his arm.

"Easy, son," he murmured. "You're forgetting something—not tonight!"

"No power on earth can stop me—no matter what happens to me!" Castleman was holding himself tense and rigid, but his low voice shook. "I am boun' to go, seh. Let me loose!"

He shed his coat with one twist, leaving it in Wheeler's hands. At the same time, freeing the tarpaulin flap, he bent forward to dive through it over the rail. The next instant he dropped at my feet, straightened out with a jerk, and lay still on his face.

Staring at the lifeless figure, a moment ago so full of vigor and fire, we all seemed stunned at the transformation. Dan had dropped the empty coat-sleeve and, as the Kentuckian bowed forward, delivered a short, light-quick chop with the edge of his hand on the outstretched neck—the wise

Digitized by Google

little blow of the Japanese, that will stun or kill without effort—and now he turned to me as cold and quiet as usual.

"Reach me a rope, Doc, in the locker under you!"

I punched Howe to rouse him, for he was staring open-mouthed at the great man-handler, and as he got up with wide eyes fixed on Dan's merciless face, the festive youth slowly breathed:

"Ga-ad! Just like that—excuse me!"

He continued to gaze as Wheeler deftly bound the unconscious man. And as the last knot jerked taut Howe remarked to himself:

"Oh no—this is no picnic! A lovely party! I'd not be this spy person—not for much fine gold!"

"Good leather!" Wheeler stood up and shot a glance of sardonic congratulation at Howe's blank face. "Glad you're next. Hang to it, and make no mistake—I play no favorites. No man will block my game tonight, for fun, money or love. What I say goes without argument. On your toes now—hep up!"

As he shot out the words like sharp rifle-cracks, he shot into us something like his own mighty virility, and we all thrilled with the power that is born only in a great leader.

"Speaking for one," Howe said slowly, as if impelled by something new within him, "I am here to do as I'm told—on the jump!"

"Same here!" Hank growled, hand on the throttle.

"So is the gentleman from Kentucky, I think!" said Wheeler drily, as Castleman drew a jerky breath and opened his eyes.

When the look in the eyes of the Kentuckian showed that he knew what had happened, Wheeler said with crisp directness:

"Well, son, no hard feeling! Right? But listen. The only way to help the girl is to go with us and obey orders—get it? Good! But, believe Dan Wheeler, you go with us! You go right along—with—us. Don't doubt it. Now, do you go on your feet, man-fashion, or gagged and roped? It's up to you!"

Castleman looked up into the face of power that was bent on him with no sign of anger or malice, and seemed to feel that he was hearing words of truth and great purpose. For, in spite of his humiliating position, he spoke with quiet dignity as he answered:

"I lost my head. I will make no mo' trouble, seh. If I can help, I will do what I am bid."

"You talk," Wheeler said with rare shyness, bending to untie the ropes and freeing a knot at each pause," like a gentleman, sir—a Southern gentleman. You have several generations of—of nerve! And—and you are going to need 'em. There you are!"

Tossing aside the ropes, he freed Castleman's hands of a pair of dainty bracelets by one practised motion, and as he slipped them into his pocket he asked Seton—

"In sight of the dock yet?"

Hank held up a warning hand and answered in a hoarse whisper, his eyes still stuck to the lookout-tube:

"Right under the nose of the *Umbria*. Which side?"

"South!" Wheeler sprang lightly into the pit by Seton's side, to take a look through the cone, meanwhile giving orders in a distinct whisper: "No noise! Don't show a glim or make a rustle. She will sail in an hour—they're still loading freight. Once past the gang-plank, the scramble of loading will make us safe. Now shut her off—let her drift. Here's hoping we don't bump. Now hold your breath."

In dead silence we looked at one another while the narrow racing-yacht drifted gently in between the big liner and her dock. Now that our engine had stopped her smooth rumble, we could hear only the slap of small waves and the rush of bilge from the liner's pump-pipes. For extra precaution Wheeler reached up and turned off the only light in the cabin, and there followed a wait that seemed like minutes. After a little the rumbling roar in the big vessel's hold swelled louder and louder. Then Wheeler turned on the light again and stirred us all up.

Howe was the first one to get his orders. Wheeler turned on him and barked softly:

"Here—you! Jar loose from that cigarette a while and get a hook! All four take boat-hooks and hold her off—two to a side. Throw up the flaps and work her in slow. Safe enough now. Faster now, put some pep in your push! That's better—steady—one more—that'll do—stop her! Here is the place for farewell messages to the folks at home, and all that fat line stage-bunk.

Digitized by Google

Hold fast, friend Hank, while I speak my piece!"

The yacht stopped well astern of the big boat, safe in a cavern formed by her bulging hold and the side of the dock. The light hung from the sheltering top of our rude cabin shone brightly on Wheeler's powerful face as he bent on us the tawny flare of his eyes, fixing and benumbing us each in turn.

"Howe, this lets you out; to go any farther with us would give us away. You and friend Hank here get out as you got in. Wait in —— Street for us three—Castleman, Doc and I. You know the place. We shall appear to you there within an hour, if we're still top-side!"

Turning to Castleman and me, the strong light threw into sharp relief the bold keen features, and he had never seemed so charged with the uncanny magnetic force that stirred a man to his marrow as when he said abruptly:

"Now men! No time for frills and feelings, but we're going against a stiff game. It's no use to dodge it. You two go through the square hole with me as my prisoners, so there'll be no talk between us, inside there. Anything to get off your chests?"

Knowing Dan Wheeler I said nothing. Castleman asked softly:

"What do we do? Any further orders?"

"When you need 'em!" Wheeler answered grimly.

"I suppose it isn't possible—to go with you," Howe ventured.

"No!" Wheeler sharply interrupted. "It would mean we'd all be croaked—all be water-soaked stiffs inside three seconds after you stepped through the hole. And there are enough stiffs under that pier with weights in their pockets now. You stick to the program and wait at the place you know, on —— Street. See? Put in your time offering up thanks you don't come on in this act—and doping out how much I win if I come through!"

He once more turned to Castleman and me, and seemed for a second to be reading us through before he issued another brisk order to Howe.

"You cub-diplomat! Get down in the bottom with Hank there, and see if you can keep still for five minutes! That's proper. Now, Doc, hold out your hands—you too, son."

He snapped nickeled handcuffs on both of us and took a look at his watch while he was cautioning the pair in the engine-pit.

"You two below, hold your breath when the hole opens! The Clam is blind and can hear a jelly-fish change his mind! If you breathe, we lose right then and there, and you know what that means. Now, on your toes everybody, this is what you're living for, men!"

And with the words, spoken with a sympathy that made this man a born leader, he once more turned off the lights.

IN THE black dark we strained our ears to learn what was happening. Dan was slowly working the yacht farther astern of the liner. A length or more he gently eased her with a boat-hook, then rapped sharply on the planks of the dock. No answer. A few yards farther he rapped again, and from within came three raps like an echo. Wheeler rapped twice, and when that was repeated, once more.

"Who goes?" an empty voice asked in German.

"Guests for the Master," Wheeler answered in English, turning to breathe a hiss for silence to the two at our feet.

His face was so close to my ear that it tickled as he very softly whispered:

"Hold your nerve. Last call for the Crimson Chamber! And hold the Cunnel under double-wraps!"

At this I felt my heart thump with delight and relief. It was the first sign he had given, for more than two weeks, that he had any feeling for me except as a cog in his wheel, and it gave me the nerve to face anything—with him. I even had a thought of sympathy to spare for Castleman, who still believed that Dan had sold us, but no time to express it.

For Wheeler was repeating the signal-knocks that were re-echoed from inside the pier, and they were hardly finished when there followed a sound of bolts shot back. Then our eyes were wonted enough to see the square of deeper black that slowly opened before us in the dark face of the planking.

The dead-white face of the blind man showed against this background as a dim, gray blur, and for one tense instant he seemed to listen so hard that I could fancy I heard him. Then he said in the flat tone of the blind—

Digitized by Google

"*Herein!*" And Wheeler rasped at us harshly:

"Up—there! No squealing now, or it'll be your last peep!"

And as he roughly pushed us through the opening from the yacht's rail, the blind man chuckled gutturally:

"*Ach!* So well you have them disciplined, Herr Wheeler! You should have a commission in the army of the Fatherland!"

At the same time he clanked the bolts behind us, and Wheeler flashed the pocket-light. We were in a dry, ceiled passage that led shoreward, and the squat figure of the blind guide was already waddling ahead of us.

In dead silence Wheeler pushed us after him, and threw the light ahead in a steady beam. Our steps sounded hollow on the boards for a short distance as we were hurried along the narrow closed passage. Then the ceiled boarding on our left gave place to a railing and we began to go up a gentle slope.

It was here that Wheeler swerved the beam of his pocket-light into the dark void on the left of our passage. Through the railing I could see dark water below, but what he wished to call to our attention was a large flume or cylindrical chute that ran alongside our bridge. From the pieces of information about the Crimson Chamber that had come into my possession, I straightway patched up the supposition that this was the way by which certain victims had reached the river. And this struck the first chill to my—marrow, is the usual word, but it felt more like the pit of my stomach.

A glimpse of the Kentuckian's marble profile in the dimly reflected light gave me an idea of what he must be feeling—half convinced that he was a lamb led to slaughter, but knowing the folly of trying to escape from Dan Wheeler.

For all my loyal trust in the great gambler, I began to weigh the case in impartial balance. If Wheeler could get more by helping the unknown demon than by taking a desperate chance of capturing him, why should he run the risk? He owed the Government nothing. Why should he sacrifice anything for it, or for the City? As for captains of industry who had been despoiled by this clever schemer—I knew that Wheeler was only too wise as to their way to wealth, and that he looked upon them as crooks with only less courage than himself. Surely his sympathy was not with them.

Last and least, since he had already done me more favors than I could ever repay, I had no balance on account to my credit. I could not expect him to lose a great stake for love of me, surely. Such thinking led panicward and I tried to stop it, but it would not stop.

Meanwhile, I reached out a hand—both hands of necessity—and pressed Castleman's arm. My hand was at once seized in his firm cold grip, and for a few steps we walked hand in hand like frightened boys—which we were.

Another flash of light to the side showed no longer any water below us, but the chute was passing up at a steeper incline. It disappeared above us in the blackness.

Our blind guide sensed either the flash or some movement of ours, for he stopped and turned to Wheeler suspiciously—his large white face squinted in cunning triumph as he called out in his vacant, tinny voice:

"What you see—yes? *Ach*—yes, we are at the end, almost—some of us, perhaps! You are impatient. Yes?"

He chuckled a flabby chuckle as he beckoned us on.

"Come, within here," he directed.

Up a steep stair we followed him, through a heavy door, and we were in a cement room, like a basement. It was bare. Not even a chair or a splinter of anything but cement could be seen. Beside the door we had come through, two other openings broke the blank concrete walls. In front of us a door-shaped opening showed a square closet with board walls, floor and ceiling. Close beside this closet a two-foot-square hole, breast-high, showed a box-like cupboard, as bare as the room and the closet.

On these openings Dan turned his light, we our eyes, and the blind man stood aside to wave us toward them, on his large flat face a smirk of complaisance as he said—

"All goes therein, everything but you and your clothing in the box, you in the lift!"

"Move now!" Wheeler suddenly barked. "Like this!"

He rapidly emptied his pockets, putting their contents in the square cupboard, his shining automatic pistol on top. Even his scarf-pin went into the pile. Then,

Digitized by Google

when he had helped us to do likewise, for we were hampered by our bracelets, he removed the handcuffs, too, warning us the while:

"No break now! The Clam can shoot you into the river from any spot on this floor, except the square he's on. Nothing more in your clothes—not a bit of metal? All ready, Klammerer! Hands up, there! Back up to be searched, and don't drop a finger if you want to live."

When he had added the handcuffs to the pile in the cupboard, he backed us up to where the blind man stood beside the closet or elevator with one hand on a row of push-buttons let into the framed opening. With hands over heads we stood to be searched thoroughly; and while the soft-seeing hands went over me I noted that the floor was of square blocks of wood that wobbled slightly like the platform of a scale. I stood mighty light and quiet, I know.

Each in turn was "frisked" and passed into the closet-elevator, Wheeler last. And the instant he was inside we shot upward, leaving the blind man behind.

I took this chance to whisper to Wheeler:

"Dan, I don't like this a little bit! Suppose——"

"You'll like it less!" he caught me up. "Wait till you're up against it, right! You been babied too much!"

The lift stopped with a jerk, and instantly we were in a light that seemed blinding. I felt that we had been thrust through a door into a warm, lighted room, heard the lift whir down behind us, then the room came suddenly into view.

I MUST have expected rich crimson tapestries and hangings, for I was surprised to see everything about us gray, in delicate shades from dull white to almost black. We stood near the end of a long, narrow room, a sort of smoking room, furnished in Holland oak and leather. At our back the lift door was closed; at our right another closed door took up half the end wall of the narrow room that stretched away to our left about thirty feet. At a center-table, placed midway, lounging in a Morris-chair, was Clark Sibley.

"I knew it!" I heard Castleman whisper to himself.

Sibley was stretched out, head thrown back on his clasped hands, watching us through narrowed lids. His smile showed his small white teeth.

Wheeler had withdrawn from Castleman and me and stood with back to the wall, arms folded and eyes on the blank wall opposite him, waiting.

In books the villain greets his victims with too perfect suavity, but Sibley did not trouble himself to do so. He nodded to Wheeler as to a servant as he said:

"All right! I've seen enough of 'em—in with 'em!"

It was not more than two seconds since we had been pushed from the lift into the gray room, and we had stood in stunned silence until Sibley spoke.

Even then Castleman had barely opened his mouth with a threatening lowering of his handsome head toward Sibley:

"You ——"

He got no farther than the one word, for the door at our right opened of itself, and at the same instant Wheeler rushed us, driving us through it and closing it after us in a flash. The door shut with an air-tight wheeze. Once more we were in the dark.

Not only in the dark, but by the feel of the air I knew we were in a room with no outlet or ventilation. The air was dead and heavy on the chest.

Now all this time, while we had been shunted and pushed about, Castleman had kept his nerve and grim silence, but the sight of Sibley had shaken him out of his self-control. Hardly had the door shut out the last beam of light when the Kentuckian hurled himself against it time after time, gasping:

"Coward! Cur! Just let me get to him—just one time! D'you see him—see the nasty smile on him? And we're trapped! He's got us trapped like rats. And Wheeler's his tool! —— *him!*"

He stared at me, face distorted with fury; then his eyes and mouth opened and his expression slowly altered to one of blank amazement.

Even in his frenzy I had noticed that he rebounded from the door-surface without a sound, then that I could see him! It was not the fact of vision that startled us but the hue—the color of things! We were all crimson—the walls of our box-like prison, our clothes, even our stunned and staring faces were crimson! Not a red, but a deep purplish crimson—the color of dark blood, guilty blood. We were bathed, steeped

Digitized by Google

in—seemed to reek and drip with the thick evil color. In this foul medium Castleman's face looked the face of a fiend in guilt and torment. We shrank from each other in sudden horror.

I seemed to fear to speak, to be held by a nightmare palsy, but the whisper: "Man—my God! We are in the Crimson Chamber! We are done—this is the end!" came from one of us.

It was the thought, the terror of both. Who whispered it I do not know. Weak with fright we felt around the walls and floor with hands that scrambled and shook, looking for crack or crevice—for anything—in vain.

"IT'S all rubber!" I fairly screamed it, as if it were the crowning horror. "Crimson rubber that glows with a crimson glow—it's an air-tight, gas-tight rubber box! There's something melted in—something phosphorescent in the walls themselves, and there's not a pin-hole even! This is where he kills 'em with gases. We're going to be asphyxiated—smothered—slowly! And we can't even mar these walls!"

There was something demoniac and mysterious about that hue—something in the rays of crimson light that ate into your vitals and robbed you of your power of control. For panicky fear seized us then and for a time we were frightened animals, nothing more.

We clawed, tore, kicked at those tough elastic walls—and made no sound nor scratch on their mocking, smooth surface! Silly, childish, and worse; yes, I know. No one can be more ashamed than I who tell it; but you never were sealed in a rubber-lined box, to suffocate in a fiendish purple-crimson glow that seared your nerve-pulps—shriveled the soul in you.

It passed, this spasm; left us both at the same instant. As at a signal we stopped our foolish scramble, gazed at each other, panting and shifty-eyed.

"Can you breathe all right—still?" I asked and my voice shook hoarsely.

"What difference, a few breaths more—or less?" Castleman became steady as he spoke, and turned to the wall behind him. "Let's go over the walls again. You take your side, inch by inch and in order, carefully. Look — Corbin — here! Shoulder high—here's a hand-hole, or was when it was open. It's closed tight now—air-tight all 'round. What—look yeah! What d'yo' reckon did this? Feel this hyeh!"

His excitement was at the discovery of a crescent-shaped notch in the edge of the small oval window or hand-hole. Its door or stopper fitted so tight and so smoothly that it would have been hard to tell it from the rest of the smooth rubber surface, if it had not been for this notch in the lower edge of the rim. I felt it carefully—even a crevice might mean hope—but found only a rough, jagged bite gone from the tough rubber rim. That was it.

"Teeth—man!" I hissed, and I could feel goose-flesh crinkle my back at the thought. "Somebody bit this out! Feel where the canines tore—must have been done when this was open. What torture could make a man bite tough rubber—tear it out bodily? Will we tear and bite each other when we—when he turns on the gas?"

Castleman was staring at me in the bloody glow, eyes dilated, staring in silence. Anything was better than the silence of horror.

"This may be the opening of the gas-pipe—the inlet for poisonous gas or vapor," I went on, "the gas that killed him, who did this—or her!"

"Her! Or *her!*" Castleman breathed, and seized my shoulder with a hand that shook. "What has the demon done with her—what will he do afterwards? While we are lying in here—smothered—gasping and retching on the floor—what will he be doing to *her?* Oh, great God! *This is* ——!"

Even as he groaned aloud I heard a sticky crackle at the small port. It gave outward, letting in a beam of blessed white light.

The Kentuckian lifted his face which he had buried in his hands, and from the flare of hate in his steel-blue eyes I knew he saw Sibley's at the window, even before the soft mocking voice answered—

"Not quite—or not yet, I should say!"

The face came closer, and now it was the face of a fiend unmasked. No longer restrained or shaped for the purpose of deception, the features actually became those of a leering, malevolent demon, as Sibley gloated and baited his victims.

"No, you haven't got to the pit yet. It's the next station but one! But you'll get there, don't fret!"

Closer he came, to snarl through the opening:

Digitized by Google

"And to give you a foretaste, before you go on to the terminus, we'll roast you alive—roast you to a crisp—to ashes! Oh, you'll get your hell hot and heavy!"

We made no sign, and he took his weapon by another handle.

"Dead men may tell no tales, but they do furnish evidence. Burned men—burned up men—don't. See the point?"

The wrinkles at his eye-corners deepened with his leering smile. Even his voice became more throaty with the true pervert's ecstacy in torture, and he gloated on:

"Ah-h—you're a rich haul in there—the last best catch of the Crimson Chamber. And a sweet time we'll have toasting you! I'd like to see you blister and curl up—frizzle to a cinder! Listen—" in his eyes was a maniac glare—"listen hard! These rooms are in the heart of the district where no fire is checked until it has destroyed a few blocks at least. On both sides of you are store-rooms packed with volatile oils and explosives. These rooms will be a-roar with flames that literally beat —— five minutes—three minutes after I press this button; right here—I've got my thumb on it!"

He paused dramatically and went on again in a changed voice, low and breathy, shaking with passionate lust:

"And *de-ar* Mr. Castleman—and Doctor Corbin. While you are the core of the hottest fire of the season—look now! Mary Lloyd and I shall be sailing out of the harbor in the *Umbria!* While the fire-engines are rolling to the third alarm, we shall be safe in our stateroom—I and my— Yah! You would!"

The beast dodged just in time. Castleman, crouched and tense, had of a sudden lashed out at the foul face at the window. So vicious was the drive that fist and arm shot full length through the window, side and shoulder landing hard against the wall.

Though I caught him around the waist to drag him back, I was too late.

The Kentuckian's face set in lines of agony, he ground his teeth and the blood left his face. Sibley had caught the outstretched arm and was twisting, wrenching it over the port-hole's edge as a fulcrum.

I heard the shoulder ligaments go with a grisly crack. Though his face twitched, the Kentuckian made no sound. Then I got a foot on the wall, close up to the window, and straightened out with what strength there was in me.

Together we came away from that window to the floor. I don't recall some of the remarks I made to the cur through the window, others won't go into print, but meanwhile I was stripping and examining the shoulder. It was a subcoracoid dislocation of the shoulder-joint, easily replaced. I got it into a sling and it was not very painful.

DOING something helpful put me in a more wholesome frame of mind; also we had a beam of real light now, and I shall always maintain that that crimson glow from the walls of that infernal torture-chamber was peculiarly poisonous. As I finished the sling I had a straw of hope to hold out to my patient.

"There—that's the best I can do. It won't hurt so much, after a bit. Now listen! I don't know why I have been such an idiot, unless it's this blanked crimson reek, but I *know* Wheeler hasn't sold us out! I've been in almost as bad scrapes as this before with him and I tell you Dan has been fooling Sibley all along, for a purpose. And he has a good reason now for doing this. He is using us as a bait, in order to land Sibley for good and all. It was the only way he could get him, to play out his part as Sibley's tool almost to the very end. You will see!"

In pain though he was, Castleman answered quietly but unconvinced:

"What can he do, unarmed, and against a man stronger than he and more skilled in every way? And, tell me, why does he stand by and see that filthy cur torture us? Why does he let him carry off the girl?"

He started up to pace the small cell, two steps, then turn, with hands clenched and face haggard.

"Why should he—why should any gambler lose such a huge stake for a sentiment?" he demanded. "That devil, Sibley, will take care to offer him his price, to outbid his enemies. I don't like to doubt yo' word, seh, or yo' friend, but—there he stands. Ask him!"

From near the open port I could see Sibley walking the long, narrow room, rubbing his hands with relish. Dan still stood where he had taken his Napoleonic pose, just beyond the lift door on the left, with back to the side-wall. Still as a statue, head slightly bent, he kept his tawny, green eyes on Sibley. His thin lips were pressed

Digitized by Google

in a cruel straight line that might mean anything.

"Dan!" I called. "Do you stand for this thing?"

Still Wheeler gave no sign. I fancied that through the narrowed lids his long eyes emitted a malevolent gleam toward the chuckling demon. But Sibley flashed about, little white teeth bared.

"Stand for it, you poor boob! Do you suppose a man of Wheeler's sense has been stringing you along for your *beaux yeux?* Your friend, Dan Wheeler, has helped me to much wealth and done many smooth jobs, but never a smoother one than when he stalled you two lollops with the Nameless Order bunk! I shall have to pay him a wicked price for trapping you, but he's worth it. A wonderful man, your friend, Mr. Wheeler!"

"Dan!" I called again. "Can't you give us a sign, a nod? Have we got to burn and smother in this rubber box?"

"This is rich—the best yet!" Sibley stuck his fiend-face between me and Wheeler. "Just to make you happy, let me tell you that I am backed by a power with money and brains! Don't think for a minute that we have made any mistake. We have guaranteed Mr. Wheeler just double the money that you or anybody could offer him to sell us out! Just realize that—it's the only way to make sure of loyalty. We take no chances, we ——s. That's why we shall rule the world! But I have played with you long enough."

Turning toward Wheeler, but speaking so that we could hear him, Sibley continued with slow relish:

"Yes, Mr. Wheeler has done his part, so far. I am only holding him now as hostage for the safe appearance of Miss Lloyd. I told her to come to me, and she will come. But Mr. Wheeler has remarkable influence. He might have put obstacles in her way, so I have not yet shown him the other exit from these rooms. The water-way is already closed, to stay closed. When Miss Lloyd comes, the way to the street will be opened, and you will see the last of your friend, Dan Wheeler, after I have paid him a fearful price."

He was talking absently, listening meanwhile. For the first time I felt a real pang of hopeless misgiving, for Dan never so much as flicked an eyelash my way. He might at least give me an encouraging glance—any furtive signal—when Sibley's back was turned. But that subtle demon gave us another surprise. He suddenly smiled at Wheeler.

"Congratulations, Herr Wheel-err!" said he. "At times I have had my doubts of you, and one look of understanding toward your young victims would have spelled your finish! But either you act well, or you live up to your reputation for keeping your word. You have done your part well—if Miss Lloyd comes—and I think I hear her now."

He was looking and talking straight at our little window. I could hear Castleman breathing hard at my shoulder; I found I was again trembling myself. There was a long, long moment in which none of us moved. Sibley and Wheeler faced each other, eye to eye, until somewhere an electric buzzer whirred. Then Sibley cast a glance of triumph toward us and walked very slowly to the far end of the long room.

That end, paneled like the other walls, had a blind door. For on Sibley's pressing a concealed spring or button, four of the panels swung inward. In that doorway stood Mary Lloyd, alone.

IN something cream-white, soft and thick, that wrapped her slender, rounded figure in flowing curves, she was a picture of blinding beauty against the background of the dark. In her wide dark eyes was the far look of the sleep-walker; about her delicate lips, barely open, was a child-like listening sweetness. The pure loveliness of her hurt. I heard a stifled sob from the Kentuckian, and I turned to shake his shoulder.

"She doesn't know where she is or what she's doing," I whispered. "Man, she's hypnotized—acting under post-hypnotic suggestion, like an automaton!" And Sibley at that instant gave proof of it. He said sharply:

"Mary! Come here!"

She immediately moved toward him, but her usually brilliant face was a blank, beautiful mask. When she reached the table and was about to strike it, he said—

"Stop!"

Sibley passed around her to the door, closed it and came back to face her across the table. He was clearly excited, as his voice showed by trembling.

"Give me the papers you have!"

From the bosom of her dress she took a

Digitized by Google

flat packet which he eagerly seized and opened. After a quick look at them—they seemed to be maps and charts on India paper—he folded them and stowed them carefully in an inside pocket. Turning to Wheeler he said briskly:

"You have fulfilled your part of the contract. Now for your pay!"

He wheeled to the wall behind him and opened one of the square panels, disclosing a cupboard like the one in the cement room below.

It was the same box inside, a sort of dumb-waiter, for I could make out the pile of our belongings—Dan's automatic on top. Sibley pocketed this, put the other things on the center-table, then opened the adjoining panel. From this second cupboard he brought a steel lock-box, small but strong and heavy, also a thick leather traveling-bag that seemed to contain another. Putting them on the table, he opened the box and took out a chamois bag.

"In here," he said to Wheeler, "are jewels worth two hundred thousand dollars, all foreign or recut, readily marketable here."

Beside the bag on the table he also placed a flat packet, saying:

"The same amount in Bank of England notes—to outbid our friends, the enemy. Do you want to count them?"

As Wheeler never moved nor spoke, Sibley smiled but shot at him a keen glance.

"You trust me that far? I will say you have been square with me—made no professions of honesty or friendship—but it is a part of our policy to leave nothing to chance. We make sure! You are free to go now, unless you care to join me in baiting our captives a bit before we leave them to their rubber funeral pyre."

I noted that the wary devil kept between Wheeler and our cell, with his hand already in the pocket that contained the automatic pistol. Armed as he was, on his guard, skilled even beyond the famous cracksman in jiu-jitsu, and with youth and strength in his favor, I could see no chance for Dan to save us if he tried, and I could stand it no longer. But even as I opened my shaking lips, Castleman thrust me aside to shout:

"You Wheeler! Are yo' a man? Will yo' see that foul thing take this gyerl and stand? Think of yo' mother—man! Go to him! Kill the cur!" And his vibrant voice broke hoarsely.

Sibley stood with eye on the statue-still gambler, hand in pocket, toying with the weapon, as he answered:

"Mr. Wheeler, I repeat, is a man of sense. He knows he can do nothing. I am not only armed, but the better man. Mr. Wheeler is harmless at present."

He turned so that he faced our window, backing away to keep an eye on Wheeler at the same time.

"Watch this, you two fools!" he called to us, then over his shoulder: "Mary, you know I'm your master. Say it!"

"Yes, you are my master."

The clear sweet words brought a groan from Castleman, and Sibley enjoyed that. He went on—

"And you are glad to be my mistress—say it!"

When she obediently echoed the words, he went further yet. I have succeeded in forgetting some of the things he made her repeat. She would not have known their meaning if she had been awake, but if I had not been engaged in trying to restrain Castleman I think I should have been tearing at the tough rubber rim of that little window myself, as he was. He even tore out two pieces with his teeth, like our unknown predecessor, while I tried to drown the voices outside by shouting in his ear:

"Put your fingers in your ears, man! Don't do that! It's just what he wants—it keeps him going. Down, down! Down on the floor and stop your ears! Dan—Dan Wheeler! If you can't kill the whelp, shut this hole! Chloroform or smother us! How long will you stand for this?"

There came a sudden silence, and I was drawn to the window by the fascination of horror.

SIBLEY had drawn Dan's pistol from his pocket and stood panting and snarling, glaring at Wheeler as if he had gone mad. I looked at the great gambler for the reason. Dan had not moved a muscle, but on his thin lips was a slight curl of contempt—that was all.

It was enough, however. It apparently drove the beast to further outrage.

"You—Kentucky gentleman, in there!" he shouted. "Watch this!"

With his free arm he attempted to embrace the girl. I tried to thrust Castleman from the hole, but we both saw what happened.

At the first actual contact of the brute,

Digitized by Google

the girl shrank and moaned as if in pain. At that Sibley clutched her savagely. It was all that was needed to arouse her. The hypnotized subject will not submit beyond a certain point to violation of his or her basic moral nature, that is well proven, and it had new proof here.

At the first touch of Sibley's hand, Mary Lloyd's face flashed into full consciousness. With a shriek she tore away his arm in an ecstasy of horror and repulsion.

The utter loathing in her face, lovely even in distortion, enraged the beast. With his clenched fist he struck her.

The foul blow landed fair between the wide, dark eyes. Without a sound she dropped to the floor, mercifully unconscious.

In the silent instant after, while not a man of us breathed, I saw Sibley's face alter strangely. Not that he was capable of shame or remorse. He was too much the pervert for that, but in the reaction of spent rage, it seemed as if he weakened—lost something of his callous invulnerability. What I saw was that he shrank physically from the menacing, smiling contempt in the powerful face of Dan Wheeler.

The great gambler and manhandler, on the other hand, seemed to grow and tower, his long green eyes to glow with more potent force. Depraved though he was, and no physical coward, Sibley knew that fear was dangerous, even fatal. He was afraid of fear, as his words showed—

"Now then, none of that spell-binding bunk on me! It won't go! The show's over. Take your stuff and make your getaway while the going's good!"

He shouted loudly. Still Dan neither moved nor spoke. Sibley whipped out his watch, and his wild alarm showed that he had not a second to spare. He knew that a few minutes of delay meant his ruin. If the boat sailed without him, now that his game was up, he would be a hunted criminal. He flew into screaming rage.

"You old, broken-down crook!" He shook a fist at Wheeler. "Out of my sight, or roast with your two —— in there. Clear out! There's the door—get!"

He had started toward the door at the far end, the way to the street-entrance, but bethought him of the danger of leaving Dan unwatched. He wheeled, darted back to our end, and with one hand on the fire button, while the other held Dan covered with the pistol, he shouted:

"I count three—press this button, and shoot you with your own gun! Hike—or go to ——! One——"

"Dan!" I shrieked insanely. "Don't let him!"

"Three!" finished Sibley, fired point-blank at Wheeler's head at ten feet and pushed the button time after time. Three times he pushed and pulled the trigger together.

Crash! Crash! Crash! The ringing roar of the weapon filled the room. Like echoes came three muffled explosions from without, shaking the walls and proving that the firing-contrivance had done its work. Though the whole room rocked to the uproar, I saw with incredulous eyes Wheeler's pale, strong features unchanged and motionless. He had loaded his gun with blanks!

"Quick now, Dan!" I yelled, jumping up and down with wild childish impatience. "For your life—for the lives of all of us! Watch out! He's got another!"

For Sibley had flung away the useless weapon in disgust and pulled his own from his hip.

Wheeler drew himself up to full height, seemed to grow in stature and virile power, while his face lighted with a fierce, terrible light; then he crouched and sprang like a panther!

"Oh-h!" I heard Castleman moaning at my ear. "Corbin—can you pray?"

Like Sibley himself, I knew that the Kentuckian believed Wheeler could be no match for the skilled and dangerous young athlete. The Kentuckian had never seen Dan Wheeler go into action. I thought I had, but——

"Look at that—man!" I was crowding with Castleman for a look outside. "Just watch him now! What——"

I held my breath at the sight. Diving forward headlong under Sibley's leveled gun, it looked as if Wheeler had missed his tackle. But he had purposely dived to one side. As he passed under and to the side of the weapon's flash, his right arm whipped out around Sibley's hips.

The fierce tackle whirled them both to the wall and floor with a crash. They sprang apart and to their feet with lightning-like speed. Again Sibley fired and Dan dived to the other side. This time the driving impetus of his attack whirled them half the room's length, rolling over and over

Digitized by Google

each other so swiftly that it was impossible to distinguish one from the other.

Up, apart and together again! With such fury they fought that the room was a roaring whirlwind of flying limbs, breaking furniture and flaming pistol-shots that crashed at regular intervals.

Castleman and I alternately gasped, held our breaths and clawed at the window-edge, unconscious of everything but the superhuman struggle. For, although I had seen Wheeler break the great Searing unaided, with his bare hands, I had never seen anything like this.

Sibley had rested secure in the consciousness of his own greater skill and youthful vigor, and Wheeler had therefore thrown skill and science to the winds and let himself loose in a blast of pure fighting savagery, an explosion of virile power so tremendous that he seemed a very demon of annihilation. And so far from lacking in strength to match the younger man, he came on after each crashing onset with a speed and vicious fury more overwhelming and irresistible. No mere man could keep up that pace sixty seconds. It was as if the man was possessed of all the devils from the pit.

CASTLEMAN dragged at my shoulder and fell fainting at my feet. At the same time I felt a pain in the calves of my legs, and turning around I was choked and half blinded by flames and smoke. The cell was thick with the sharp, rank fumes of rubber, already frying and crinkling on the wall and floor behind us. Castleman, weakened, and with only one arm to hold on by, had dropped to the floor where the gases were still more fatal.

I dragged him up to the port, urging him to hold on as best he could, holding his face to the window while I choked, held my breath and shouted:

"Dan! Help—quick! We're burning—choking. Fire! Help!"

Strangled, I had to clap my face to the hole for a life-saving breath. Through the smoke now pouring into our end of the long room I saw Dan make another whirlwind attack. This time he got a hip-lock on Sibley, hurled him over his shoulder, whirling through the air for more than ten feet, to crash against the very window itself and to fall to the floor stunned and still.

I must have been overcome by the fumes at the same instant, for I next recall Wheeler dragging us out of the cell together, one with each hand, and half the length of the room. It was none too soon, for I was just helping the Kentuckian to his feet when I saw the walls of the Crimson Chamber collapse and fall away into a flaming chimney that roared upward like a blast-furnace.

Mary Lloyd was just stirring, and she opened her eyes when the Kentuckian and I put her in the Morris-chair. She smiled up at me—I happened to be directly in her way—and held out her arms. I knew she confused me with Castleman, but it took my breath just the same and I had to bite on my lips and turn away.

"Watch out!" Castleman shouted just then. "The snake!"

For the scorching heat had revived Sibley, and viper-like he was furtively crawling after his automatic that lay almost under the table near us.

I kicked it, just as he made a sudden lunge for it, and sent it spinning across the floor into the roaring furnace.

Wheeler had given it one glance, seen that it was safely disposed of, and turned to the box and bag on the table. In the blistering heat he was as cool and quiet, as alertly masterful as always. He put chamois bag and money into the box and handed both box and Sibley's bag to me with the brisk order—

"Hustle those two babes to the stairs, Doc! Then come back alone. I got a job to finish!" With the last word he turned grimly toward Sibley. "He's harmless, Dan—let him burn! It's not safe here. See, the floor's sinking already!"

His only answer was a quick wave of his hand behind him. I knew it was no time for argument and obeyed with a rush. Thrusting the box into the Kentuckian's sound arm, I urged him:

"Hang to this, and look out for your shoulder—I'll carry her. Open the door!"

If it had not been our good fortune to find that Sibley had failed to shut that door in his hurry, we might have lost vital moments in finding the button. But it was not fastened and gave way at my kick.

Mary Lloyd's arms were around my neck, and she was as light, it seemed, as a child. Along a narrow passage we hurried, I carrying the traveling-bag as well as the girl, lifting my feet high and expecting every instant to prance off into a dark shaft or

Digitized by Google

stairway. Once the passage turned at a right angle. I felt the wall in time—the best authorities have decided that it is really an act of unconscious hearing—and avoided a collision. And shortly after, we reached a door that barred our way.

Castleman fumbled for the lock. The door swung out, and out we stepped, midway of the lighted stairway of a dingy office building.

I caught at the old-fashioned banister to keep from pitching down the stair in the sudden light. Castleman blinked around him in astonishment.

"Mm-mm—hush, hush!" he exclaimed softly. "This sho' did show some sense!

"Hyeh the Govehnment sleuths have been huntin' every blessed dark alley, fo' a mile aroun' hyeh! An hyeh's the mysterious entrance of the Crimson Chambeh—right where thousands pass it every day! They never would have found it. Not in a thousand yeahs!"

He started down the short winding flight, for the narrow door was a part of the slanting matched-board wainscoting that formed the staircase wall, saying—

"There shure must be a night-watchman —don't yo' reckon?"

"Yours to command, gentlemen and lady!"

A little man was bowing on the stair below the Kentuckian, his coarse black hair flopping down to sweep the next step. When he straightened up and swept back his long forelock, I saw the smiling face of Wheeler's faithful "Mike"—Dan's abbreviation of Mikado—the little Jap who had assisted us in the "White Room" magic and other busy doings.

"Many brief minutes I await you to come forthward! I still foresee the very honorable Sled!" Wistfully eager, he glanced through the open secret door in search of the man he deified, meanwhile intoning plaintively: "Many—many moons since it is forbid I speak or see that so glorious Sled. Might I soon see him—no?" He asked me, as one who might know, breathlessly: "He is well yet? And will come right-off-soon—no?"

"Sure! He's all right!" Stabbed with remorse at the lost seconds and their possible consequences, I wheeled about. "Take good care of these friends of his—and I'll get him!"

Tearing madly along the dark passage, I got a bad bump at the elbow-turn that I had forgotten, for I was wild with shame and anxiety. Had I failed Dan at last? Was I too late?

A smoky, red rectangle ahead of me sent a scorching radiation that seared my eyeballs, even at a distance. I bowed low and lower as I forced myself nearer to the roaring inferno that sent out its withering blast of oven heat and deadly gases. I even reached the very door itself.

Wheeler and Sibley were still there, alive, and still at it!

Half the room was gone, licked up by the flames that shot up and up the huge and growing chimney, and the near half of the floor sagged so steeply that table and chairs had slid into the devouring gulf. In the murk, against this blood-red, white-hot, flaming background, two great figures leaped and wavered to and fro, huge ghastly genies from the fiery pit, fighting on the sloping margin of the pit itself.

Sibley, seared and scarred horribly, darted back and forth across the blistering slope in a wild, trapped-animal frenzy, making desperate dashes for the door. He still had enough left of his fiendish vitality to keep out of Wheeler's grasp on the uncertain footing of the slanting floor. Dan could only guard the outlet and smash him back as he made his repeated efforts to get out. Sibley's clothes, blackened and in torn ribbons, showed that they had furnished a weak hand-hold, and his lithe body was as slippery and elusive as an eel.

He came at it just as I approached, clawing up the slope, hugging to him with one arm a strong-box, like the one I had carried out—where he had kept it hidden I don't know—and his face came out of the smoke within a few feet of mine.

I GAVE a cry of horror at the sight, for that face was a fearsome thing, a charred, cracked and bloody pulp. Wheeler smashed it back with his fist, a fist that was already blood-stained and blackened by many smashes like it, and the creature went back down the slope, scratching and clawing for a hold.

Almost at the very edge the thing that was once a man got a foothold and crawled up again—got to its one hand and feet for another frantic dash for life and safety.

Again and again the featureless horror that had been Sibley came clawing up that

Digitized by Google

slope that sagged and curled in the deadly heat, and kept coming, darting and dodging at the coveted doorway from all angles, while Wheeler stood guard just inside, smashing the creature back with heavy merciless blows that drove it stunned and reeling, slipping and scrambling—back, back and down, almost over the fiery edge. The withering heat roused and drove it up and on to the next hopeless effort.

The vitality of the revolting monster was marvelous. It seemed impossible to stop the catlike thing with the charred, gargoyle face, bashed and burned out of human sense or seeming. In an awful silence and persistence it kept coming, and coming again; and again got its smash to send it clutching and clawing back—back!

Now its face showed again—only a pulpy black-and-purple surface, cracked and crisped, with a jagged hole where the mouth had been, with a few scattered teeth left; above it two small blood-red eyes that gleamed dull and evil rage, and in them nothing else but the pitiful, fearful instinct to cling—to hold on and escape.

"Dan!" I called in appeal. "Let it go! Let it out and come away. The floor is going—come!"

I grabbed at his coat as he flitted past. It was scorched so that it tore in my hand like wet paper. I understood then why Dan had not been able to hold Sibley for an instant.

This time Wheeler's blow drove the thing back farther than ever. For a long agonizing second it sprawled and kicked desperately on the very edge that slithered away beneath its frantic struggles, then slowly gained its way. Part way up the sagging slope, it raised on its knees, still clasping the box, and waved its horrid, bleeding head from side to side in dizzy, swooning weakness—and came on once again!

"Now, Doc," Dan shouted, as he followed the creature's dodging from side to side, "be ready to grab my legs!"

Even as he shouted, he struck at the elusive thing, caught it fair and knocked it flat, unconscious. The box fell from its palsied grasp. Wheeler pounced on it. Just then the floor itself gave another sag, but Wheeler dived under the licking flames, head down the steep incline, caught the sliding man in one hand—the other held the box—just as I got a hold on his feet around the ankles.

I had to throw myself head-first down the slope to reach him. Again the floor sagged, and we slid, head down, farther and farther.

"How 'bout it, Doc?" Wheeler called up, clear and unafraid, even as we slid; and he hung to his man and box with a death-grip. "Going down?"

"Not this trip!" I shouted with a hysterical sob as I clung to his ankles. "Unless my feet come off!"

The floor gave another sickening sag under our weight. We slid farther and my wide-spread feet caught the door-frame on each side. I found I could hold the weight, and although the near flames now licked and scorched my back I could breathe in the sucking down-rush of cool air next to the sloping floor.

But now the floor was almost vertical. Hanging head-down I could not budge their double weight one inch, though I strained and strained again.

"Let go, Dan!" I gasped, panting and weak from the effort, "let go or we're done for!"

"Hang, Doc!" Wheeler grunted back through his clenched teeth. "Hang! That-a-boy, Doc!"

I could feel him strain and double. I thought his bones and tendons must snap, and knew I was being pulled in two. But you had to do Dan Wheeler's bidding. I bit on my teeth, petrified as I was. Then I felt him slowly climbing up his own legs, hitching with one hand, until he got my wrist, then my hair—it was a perfect mat—my coat, then he climbed over me, dragging the box with one hand and—I learned afterward—holding Sibley's wrist in his teeth.

That door, praise be given, pierced a solid brick wall, and from its solid threshold Wheeler quickly snatched me to safety in the passage behind him. I wanted to stop to breathe, but Dan roused me mercilessly.

"On the job here, Doc! Swing to this box—it's hot!"

He thrust the burning metal into my hands. I pushed it back a safe distance, because the thing in his hands was still fighting weakly to get through the door and escape, and it took all he could do with his other hand to hold it on the slope inside.

"The box is safe. It can't get it now. Let that horror go, for God's sake, Dan! Let the thing get away!"

"Think I been roasting just for that box?" Wheeler snapped fiercely. "No!

Digitized by Google

Here's what I want—and I got 'em, by golly! The papers!"

The thing had been struggling with him, trying to bite, making weak efforts to gouge his eyes with its charred fingers, tearing to get away. But with both hands free, Dan easily tore from the scorched vest's inner pocket the papers that bore the precious plans—precious because they were evidence that Dan had caught the snake at last. And the thing was not unlike a scorched and dying snake now, as it wriggled to get away from the torture of the flames licking its very back.

"Now let it go, Dan! Pull it out—let me help!"

I reached for the thing in a horror of pitiful repulsion. It caught my hand in its burning-hot claw, hard-crisped to the bone. But even as I reached the other hand to help, sick and turning away my head, I felt Dan's strong grip on my arm. His deep, slightly-hoarse voice sounded vibrant in my ear.

"That was settled, Doc, long ago. *He—goes—down!*"

With the words he tore off and flung back the weak-clinging hand. Arms wide outflung, the thing toppled back, looming huge in the murk. The grotesque gap in its face opened wide at last, and its long, wailing shriek, the very awful cry of a fiend in torment, grew distant, muffled, died away as it vanished, falling through the flames.

XIV

MIKE, loyal little Jap, was waiting on the stairs. He had sent Mary Lloyd home in a closed carriage with the Kentuckian as escort, and he was shivering with the cold and eagerness to see his hero. He had taken off his coat to wrap the steel box and leather bag, over which he stood guard.

At the sight of Dan, black as a negro but as magnetically compelling as ever, the tears ran down the little man's cheeks—I never saw a Jap cry before or since—but he smiled and bowed double. Then he took charge of the hot steel box I carried and made way for us to the street.

We met the fire-fighters swarming up the stairs with the hose, and when we reached the street we ran into young Howe full-tilt. He had got inside the fire-lines to look for us, at the command of the personage from Washington, and he was scared serious and anxious for once. His boy-face lighted and he recovered his boyish talk and grin at once:

"Gee! But you sure look like 'Back from hell!' Just the same you'll look powerful good to the Senator! Hurry—he's in that big Sedan of his Aunt's, and he's just about throwing a fit by now—for fear you'd fallen down on your job! Say—" he got my arm as we hustled through the staring crowd—"who was the demon—did he bite off your friend's arm? And for the love o' Mickey who was the veiled queen that kidnapped him and carried him off in a taxi? She looked re-al nice. Was she the demon disgeezed? I got an awful habit o' talkin' t'myself—what?" For I had answered none of his questions.

"Refuse to talk without counsel—is this the car?" I asked.

"Well it just is the car!"

The door flew open, and a flaxen-haired athlete pulled us in bodily. From his pictures I had thought him a dark-sleek-and-dignified prig, but he was more the towslehead football type, and his eyes were sky's true-blue—very strong and steady. At the sight of Wheeler his face flushed with excitement, but he turned to me to ask with a boyish understanding that quite flabbergasted me and won my whole heart:

"And this is the great Wheeler? No time for introductions. You have—succeeded?"

At the same time he let go his strong grip on my hand and reached it to Dan with eager question in his face. Wheeler took the hand, and in his dangerous face came the rare, half-quizzical quirk that made it fascinating. But he too spoke to me.

"How 'bout it, Doc? You're the interpreter!"

"Dan succeeded!" I hastened to assure this surprisingly young and intensely in-earnest man that all America honored and trusted, because I saw he was suffering from suspense. "He got all the plunder and papers, and landed the demon—so he'll stay landed!"

"Thank the good God for that!"

The perfect reverence and deep, thankful relief of the Senator's emphatic words got me by the throat. He took off his hat and threw back his thick curly hair with a deep breath of relaxation. Then he continued:

"It means we are safe for a time, at least. But, can you tell me what you mean by

Digitized by Google

'landed?' What have we to expect in the future from the——"

"Expect! Future!" I broke in, forgetting whom I was addressing. "You don't know Dan Wheeler. He finished the job! The Crimson Chamber—demon and all—are right square in the middle of that fire! There isn't a pinch of ashes left by now, except what Dan's got in his lap." For Dan had the bundle in his lap now we were off, and the Jap was riding with the driver.

"Thank God, again!" the young Senator said slowly, adding, "and Dan Wheeler who 'finished the job!' " He kept his hat off and leaned forward with a serious respect as he said: "I want the honor of shaking hands once more with the man who finished this great and dangerous work. We have no Victoria Cross in America—no honor or reward great enough for you, sir!"

"I'm getting my pay now," said Wheeler, now red where he wasn't black, and again came the rare little quirk of the cruel lips as his eyes narrowed to greenish slits. "Never expected to talk to a Senator, except through the bars—or an interpreter." He slanted his burnt-cork look my way.

The Senator seldom laughed, but when he did he made a business of it and called in the neighbors. You couldn't help joining in and you didn't want to try. We were all happily relieved from torturing tension, and it took only a little push to send us over the edge of hysterics. Before we reached the New Astorbilt, where every comfort and luxury had been prepared for us in advance, we had all been boys together. It was a great party.

In the lobby of Manhattan's swellest hostelry was a pack of reporters who had collected hot on the scent of the assembled great men of New York, in the sure knowledge that something was going to break. But we were body-guarded by a dozen men whose names Gotham spells with capitals, so the knights of the pencil never touched us, and even to the great men themselves Dan would give no satisfaction until such time as he was good and ready.

"A warm tub and some glad scenery," he said with firm crispness, "then we'll hold an experience meeting and open the pay-envelope!"

I might have spared my audible blushes for Dan's crass commercialism. It only excited the admiration of the plutocrats. At the banquet that followed Dan was lionized and toasted to his great disgust, and I reflected what radiance I could until Dan spoke his piece.

"Well, gentlemen," said a famous after-dinner speaker, rising to act as spokesman for the "Wealth" of New York, "in the absence of our chosen chairman, Mr. Clark Sibley, I have been asked to propose a toast. I give you the man who is our creditor! We owe him many debts; we owe it to him that we are free from an incubus, a nightmare that has long ridden us burghers of New Amsterdam. If it were not for him we should not dare assemble here for this purpose tonight—should not dare even to say we are free. Not only as citizens of New York are we free from fear, but to this same man we owe our freedom from another fear, a fear of nation-wide disaster! To do this great and knightly deed this man has more than risked his life. Any return we can make will be too small. Gentlemen, I give you—Dan Wheeler!"

The uproar drove the reporters, shut outside the banqueting-hall, to incipient insanity. After it had subsided, and the shouts for "speech" had got Dan to his feet, there came a silence that crackled.

Of all the faces of the "Men on Top," seated around the brilliant table and now leaning forward in listening eagerness, there was not one that had the keen incisive power that made Dan Wheeler's strong features look still more thoroughbred by contrast. He stood looking deliberately and easily around the circle with his level man-taming gaze, and even in the listening hush you could hear him "get them!"

"GENTLEMEN! You called for a speech." His clear-cut words, in the clean English he could use at will, seemed to go straight to the core of each man. "Some of you want to hear an old crook talk his patter, to laugh and tell about it afterward; some want to hear about a killing or a safe-cracking; and many of you want to know about the Crimson Chamber and the man who had you bluffed—scared until you were afraid to go home in the dark. I am going to tell you a story. Call it, 'From Father to Son, or the Inherited Curse!'

"Conrad Schreiner, twenty-five years ago, was one of the most dangerous spies and one of the cleverest cracksmen in London. He had killed many men, and he did

Digitized by Google

me the honor to think he had to kill me.

"He tried. After he had tried, and before he—died, he cursed me in two languages. He believed in curses and he did a finished job, winding up with the statement that I would die at the hand of one of his own blood. And that was the end of Conrad Schreiner."

There came a slight pause in which I heard the Senator on my left murmur:

"A gem? A——"

But Dan was speaking again.

"The Crimson Chamber, gentlemen, and the plot that it served, were the work if a man with money, brains, and a strong Government behind him. He was more dangerous because he had no conscience—no list of things not done! He had no ropes of any kind on him, so he could do almost anything. He seized and terrified any man who had what he wanted—killed him if necessary and took it from him. He never appeared, himself, in working his schemes; he made others do the dirty work by working on their special weaknesses. And when he had used them he put them out of the way. That was how he went so long unsuspected.

"He himself had two weaknesses—women and pride of his own skill, especially in man-handling—and by these he fell. But it was no easy job to get him. If it had not been for the Doctor, here, there is an even chance that I should be under the water beneath Pier Number Twenty-three, and the demon of the Crimson Chamber would be outside Sandy Hook, on the *Umbria*, with the goods and the girl! But the night before last, Doctor Corbin knocked Clark Sibley out in five rounds, made him insane with hate and jealousy, and it is your honored chairman whose ashes are under the ruins smoking downtown.

"I knew Clark Sibley, gentlemen, the adopted son of the banker, John Sibley, for the son of Conrad Schreiner, at the first sight of his small teeth and close-set eyes. He never saw nor heard of his father, much less of his father's curse, but he never intended to let me out of his trap alive. I give you the facts. It is up to you gentlemen of education to explain them!"

Wheeler sat down in a hush that was not broken for five seconds, and then only by whispers. Only a very few had suspected until the end of his speech that Sibley had any connection with the Crimson Chamber, and Dan's allusion to him had come so near the close of his speech that they had not yet realized that it was one of their own clique who had robbed them and been guilty of a dozen cold-blooded murders.

At length these men of force broke into small whispering groups. Never was a hilarious crowd more thoroughly subdued. When their spokesman got up he spoke in his "dear-departed" tone.

"Gentlemen, although few of us realize the danger we have escaped, I believe we have a sense of what we owe to the men who have delivered us from that danger. It has been suggested that the captured jewels, and all articles of value, be left unconditionally to Mr. Wheeler to do with as he sees fit. Those in favor raise their hands!"

Every hand went up. Even Wheeler said as he went with me part way up-town after a quiet adjournment of the assembly:

"They fooled me, after all, Doc! I had no notion they'd come through—all the way—or I'd not have rubbed it in so raw. But how many of that bunch—and most of 'em pass the plate in some church or other—how many of 'em wouldn't play Sibley's game if they had the nerve? Take out your chum the Senator and it would be hard picking. And I wouldn't trust that hook-nosed talksmith half 'round a corner. Where you going now! A poor bet—not?"

"I'm not ashamed to tell—I'm going to the Fifth Avenue house. Miss Lloyd wants to see me. No doubt she is prostrated. She sent word by Castleman and he looked mighty sober."

"Doc—" Dan looked at me solemnly—"I don't know what I'd do if anything happened to you—the world would be a 'dead Hick circuit'!" And he gave me one last lucky touch on the back as I turned away with ears burning.

IT WOULD take many reams of paper to list the valuables in those steel boxes and what became of them. Dan had money enough before, and I suspect he gave a lot to the Nameless Order. It goes without saying that he did not tell.

Both Castleman and I got more than we ever expected to own, more money than we should ever need for ourselves, and the Kentuckian spent a lot on his ancestral estate

Digitized by Google

outside Louisville where we spent a month last Fall.

There is only one other thing that needs telling here. That is what happened a few nights after the men's banquet at the Astorbilt, at another dinner.

It was a sort of second coming-out or reinstating dinner, given by the social arbiter and fine woman, Mrs. Cruger van Schuyler, at the quaint old house on Washington Place. It was a delightfully simple affair and I thoroughly enjoyed it, although I never was so scared in my life as I was on the way to that tremendous function.

Mary Lloyd was the guest of honor, and I sat on her left. Her happiness was such a lovely thing that it fairly took away my appetite. But she gave me so much of her time and attention that I don't remember whether I ate my food with the right tools, or not at all.

When I entered the big shadowy entrance-hall of the Fifth Avenue mansion, on seeing her home after the theater-party, I didn't see how I was ever going to leave her or stop looking at her. That was why I did not dare to sit down. I couldn't help saying, for the third time:

"You were mighty sweet tonight—to me —more than ever! To talk to me and walk with me—among all those delightful people —I—find it hard to tell you how it made me feel! I want to—I want you to know how I —to tell you of my gratitude."

So bewildering in her rich loveliness, she looked up at me from under the dark level lines of her brows, and the sad little smile on her lips, the sweeping curves of her head and white throat, that flowed down over round shoulder to her arms—but it's useless! I knew I ought to go away, and I could not, though my throat was choked with a dry lump I couldn't swallow.

"Gratitude, James—between *us!*"

Her slow voice was sweet, low and came with a heavenly, breathy tremor. She stepped close—so close I got the delicate fragrance of her.

"What do you think I feel? What can I do or say to the man who has given me more than life and happiness?"

Still nearer, she murmured low:

"What can I do for the man who has fought and suffered for me? Gratitude! Gratitude, James?"

With both beautiful, slender hands on my thick, clumsy chest, she said in the sweetest of sweet whispers—

"Gratitude, James, gratitude is a—mighty —poor—word!"

Fool I may be, but 'on that hint I spoke,' feeling a great fear lest I wake from an ecstatic dream. I still pray I may never wake up.

THE BLACK BASS

By John Mätter

GIVE me the gray streak of the mornin',
When the mists shoulder up through the trees,
An' the look of the lake makes your heart jump an' ache
As you spit for the lay of the breeze.
Rivers an' streams I'm no' scornin'—
I can fish in a tub an' not kick—
But for sport for sport's sake, Brother Bass takes the cake.
When the purr of your reel goes click—
Be quick,
If the purr of your reel goes click!

An' give me the calm of the evenin',
When the mists hover down thin an' white,
An' the look of the place makes your heart jump an' race
As you cast your last throw for the night.
Yes, give me the calm of the evenin';
All my troubles are sunk fathoms deep;
Mister Bass sets the pace, he's the king an' the ace
When he comes with a rush an' a leap—
Don't sleep,
If he comes with a rush an' a leap!

Digitized by Google

SANDY TAKES A HAND

By
J. Allan Dunn

Author of "The Greenstone Mask," "The Island of the Dead," etc.

A Story of Sandy Bourke

"THIS is no game for me."

The youngster, flushed and dishevelled, tossed his cards face up on the table. His voice held a nervous tension that made the rest of the players look up quizzically.

"'Tain't no kindergarten, ef that's what you mean," said a stout man who had kept out of the preceding play. The winner of the pot smiled under a black mustache, though his narrowed eyes showed no glint of humor as he gathered up the chips.

"That's the third time my full's lost to a three-card draw," protested the first speaker.

"Well?" The winner's smile vanished, his lithe fingers ceased stacking his winnings and stayed curved, flexible, ominous. "What about it?"

The boy—he was a frank-faced, upstanding chap in his early twenties—jumped to his feet. The gambler's right hand dropped swiftly beneath the table. The stout man slid back his chair.

"I'll tell you what I think about it——"

"Hol' on there jest a min-u-et."

The voice held a Southern drawl that was no brake to its virility. The blued steel of a long Colt's shone snakily as he stood facing the winner beneath the tin-shaded oil lamp that swung from the ceiling. Broad-shouldered, tall and sandy-haired, clothed in cowboy togs with workman-like leather chaparejos, one hand lightly rested on his hip above the holster of another gun, mate to the one he held presented at the winning gambler's breast.

"Hol' on, jes' a little min-u-et. They ain't no cause fer trouble. The kid ain't said nothin' out of the way. He's lost his money an' that sure entitles him to one growl at his luck. You-all hev got it an' thet 'lows you to be good-natured. 'Sides, he's noo to the habits an' customs of Western poker."

"I ain't seen you paradin' about these parts before to my recollection," said the gambler, his right hand coming leisurely to the surface again, empty, under the suggestion of the Colt's unshifting muzzle. "What are you hornin' in for?"

"My pedigree's all right," answered the sandy one easily. "An' I ain't aimin' to muss up my horns none 'thout occasion, though they's no nubs on 'em, ef I should get started. Let's you an' me leave this festive gatherin', son. Better hol' our post-mo'tems outside 'thout callin' in the coroner. Good night, gents. I think you-all play a right smart li'l game. Some day I'll sit in an' take a hand."

He slipped an urgent arm beneath the youngster's and turned to the door, setting his gun back in its holster as they stepped outside.

"An' who in blazes is that bird?" asked the winner as the door closed.

Digitized by Google

"Sandy Bourke," grunted the stout man. "New foreman down to the Three Bar outfit, pal of old man Haley's. Two-gun man, shoots right an' left *an'* straight, the boys say. Also is some poker player, Lurgan."

"Thet so? P'raps we can accommodate him some day—after he draws his pay-check. Your deal, Bob."

OUTSIDE, the cool moonlight gave strong contrast to the smoke-heavy, close atmosphere of the back room of the Hackamore saloon. A breeze, spicy with sage, hinting of distant pines, blew from the mountains, banked far away against the starry sky.

"I expect you saved me from a bad mix-up," said the youngster gratefully. "But I'd been drinking and—you saw the way the hands went. That Lurgan's a crook and that fat chap stands in with him."

"Wal, I wouldn't say thet," said Sandy Bourke. "It's more'n likely, but I'd been watchin' quite a while with both eyes skinned an' I didn't see anything. An I'm some used to lookin' out for thet kind of stuff. The cards was noo decks an' they was dealt straight. You sure spoke a whole mouthful when you said it warn't no game for you. Let it go at that."

"I suppose I'm all kinds of a fool."

"Mebbe I'm hornin' in too close to suit ye?"

"No. I'm much obliged to you. Of course I'm a tenderfoot. Let's go down to the hotel and get something decent to drink. I'm stopping there."

"Then you should hev' discovered how punk their whisky is. But I'll take a cigar."

Comfortable in tilted Windsor chairs on the deserted veranda, Sandy with a cigar, the boy with the largest highball the bar could muster, made with dubious Scotch, the latter took up the conversation.

"Would he have shot me?" he asked.

"'Pends on what you said. I don't think he's over anxious to shoot. Comin' too easy for him just now, what the boys say. He's a professional, an' they sometimes think they hev' to hev' the reputation of flashin' a gun quick, but they're generally careful who they p'ints it at. But it don't do to talk cheatin' unless yo're plumb sure an' ready to back it up with a gun. An' even ef you shoot straight you want to be dead sure of the cheatin'. Might hev' to prove it, later. My name's Sandy Bourke, foreman at Haley's Three Bar cow-ranch."

"Mine's Richard—Dick—Morton. As I said before, my feet need hardening."

He laughed a little bitterly.

"Aimin' to settle here?"

"I've got to. Do you mind if I tell you my troubles. You might help me, and I need advice, that's sure."

"Shoot," said Sandy.

Morton took a swallow of his highball and dropped his chair forward.

"I told you I was all sorts of a chump," he said. "I'm in wrong at home. Made a mess of it at college. Took all the honors in playing fool and missed them everywhere else. The details aren't pleasant. I've chewed them all over and they keep bitter. I was straight though."

"Sure," assented Sandy.

"Dad got tired finally and we had a real row. Here I am, and—read this."

Sandy held the typewritten letter over his shoulder to catch the light from the windows at their back.

E. J. Janeway. L. T. Knight.
Janeway & Knight
Corporation Attorneys.
400-412 Lincoln Building,
Phone, Main 473.
Pittsburgh, Penn.
June 22, 1914.

Richard D. Morton,
Steerville, Nev.

Dear Sir:

Acting at the request of your father, we have arranged through your local bank to honor your draft for ten thousand dollars ($10,000), the same to be applied only to the bona-fide purchase of a ranch and stock, with which your father trusts you will redeem yourself.

Very truly yours,
Janeway & Knight.
L. T. K.

Dict. L. T. K.—D. G.
Copy Richard F. Morton, Esq.

"Ten thousan'," said Sandy. "Thet's sure some nice li'l stake for an outfit."

"What I don't know about ranching is a great big naught and it gets bigger every time I think of it," said Morton. "But I've got to get busy. They cleaned me of my spare cash in there tonight. I—I need a partner. You wouldn't be willing to go in with me on shares, would you?"

Sandy laughed.

"Yo're feet are sure tender," he said. "You don't know me from a stray dawg."

Morton flushed.

"I've got to trust some one," he said.

"And I couldn't buy a fifty-dollar stack of blues till pay-day."

Digitized by Google

"It isn't the money. There's your experience."

"I'll donate that, an' welcome, Morton. But I don' sit into a game 'less I've got the stake. Mebbe I can help you some though. The cow game's changin' with the range. Now the railroads is in, they's more money growin' alfalfy an' puttin' it into the steers on the spot without herdin'. Haley's got the only decent bit of range in the county. An' yo're green.

"There's Masters' place," he went on. "There's yore chance, Morton. The old man's willin' to sell out an' hold a few acres to keep him fussin'. His boy's turned lawyer up to the city an' they's jest him an' the gel. He'd sell to you reasonable. Good land, good stock, good water an' alfalfy, an' he'd be a good neighbor. He'd teach you ranchin' too—tickle him to death. He's all-fired proud of his boy, but awful disapp'inted in him leavin' the ranch.

"Say, it's jest the thing. You can make a li'l fortune out of it an' ask yore dad out to spend the Summers, savvy? Masters is square. He's a big friend of Haley's an' I know his pedigree. Ef I had yore chance—no, I wouldn't—I've got the rovin' foot."

"Won't you go in with me as my foreman—on an interest?"

"I'm Haley's foreman. An' I'd get tired in a year. I've got the saddle itch. I take it every Fall like pi'zen oak. I'm sure some li'l ol' prodigal myself, son. I like to guess at the cards myself. But I'll take you over to Masters' Sunday ef you like. Got a hawss?"

"I can hire one, I suppose."

"Huh! I said a hawss. I'll bring one over for you. Not as good as Pete, but a hawss."

He whistled. A pony standing sleepy in the shadow of the cottonwoods across from the hotel raised his head and nickered softly.

"Come over an' I'll introduce you to the bes' li'l hawss in three States," said Sandy. "Got more brains than the res' of 'em has brands."

"WELL," said Sandy, as they left Masters' well-kept ranch and loped townwards. "What d'ye think of her?"

"She's wonderful," said Morton. "I never saw such hair and eyes. And as clever as she is sweet."

Sandy looked at him with eyebrows raised.

"I was meanin' the ranch," he said dryly.

"Oh!" The boy colored to the rim of his new Stetson. "That's wonderful, too. I don't know how to thank you. Mr. Masters is great. I'll make good, you'll see."

"Better let the ol' man do most of the coachin'."

The boy broke into a gallop and Sandy followed, chuckling softly.

"He's shore enthoosiastic, Pete," he said. "An' she's some li'l gel. Some li'l gel. Beats all how they drif' together. Acted jest like magnets to'ard each other. Me—I ain't got no more magnetism than a cast shoe. Ef I ever hitch they'll hev me hog-tied an' some other feller to do the talkin'."

"It's a great life out here, isn't it?" said Morton, reining on the crest of a long slope, drinking in the breeze eagerly, his lithe young figure aglow with youth.

Sandy looked at him admiringly.

"Got good eyes an' chin, spite his gel's mouth," he soliloquized. "An' he knows how to set a hawss. He'll do, when he's bridlewise."

"Great?" he said aloud. "You bet it's great. Sagebrush an' sky all wide open to the Wasatch mountains. Some li'l college too, son, when you git 'nitiated. Beats coopin' up in the city. Lungs are red out here, 'stead of smoke-cured, like hams. Blood's red, too. It's livin'."

DICK MORTON and Margaret Masters sat on the vine-hidden porch of the ranch-house in the twilight. They had progressed through friendship, through the first shyness of affection to the brink of deeper things and halted on the verge. Nothing had been said, only the maiden knew—as maidens do—and waited happily—as maidens wait.

Dick knew the thrill that surged through him at the touch of her fingers, the perfume of her hair, the sudden sound of her voice, and worshiped humbly at the shrine of this girl with her clear gray eyes, her clean thoughts, her healthy, radiant beauty, not knowing of the wonder in her mind that this educated young knightlet from the big cities, making astounding progress at ranching, should be the evident and willing slave of her innocent whims and coquetries. Cupid, who roves the sagebrush *vaquero*-fashion, was already heating his iron—the

Digitized by Google

Heart brand—to claim them for his own. But as yet Dick was very humble, remembering his wilder days, and very resolute to redeem himself.

Margaret handed back the letter she had been reading.

"It's fine, Dick. Did you show it to Dad?"

"Of course. But the pater is still skeptical you see. I don't blame him."

"Dad says you're a natural rancher."

"I've got to make good, Margaret, in a hurry. Because——"

The girl picked up a stray kitten and cuddled the purring thing on her lap.

The sound of hoofs came down the dusty road and Dick leaned forward.

"It's Lurgan again," he said.

The girl set down the kitten and rose. A horse stopped at the gate, a man dropped easily from the saddle, and with a low swing of his hat in graceful salute came up the little garden from the road.

Cupid took his brand out, stamped at his fire disgustedly, and fled.

"Father's inside, Mr. Lurgan," said Margaret.

"Thank you," returned the gambler, his dark eyes shining mockingly. "I wasn't aimin' to see Mr. Masters right now."

He settled himself nonchalantly in a chair.

"They got in some real candy from San Francisco down to the store," he said, passing over a big box to the girl.

"Oh, thank you," said Margaret, diving delightedly among the lace-paper. "They're dandy. Have one, Mr. Lurgan. You, Dick?"

"No thanks," said Dick glumly, wondering why he hadn't thought of the candy.

"It won't hurt you," said Lurgan. "Pure sugar. Couldn't hurt an infant."

The talk languished, though the candy served to bridge the trickle of unrest that widened with the minutes. Lurgan talked lightly, easily, with touches of humor thrown on local happenings that brought laughter to the girl and deeper gloom to Dick. Margaret glanced at him disappointedly from time to time, and presently her father joined the group.

The candy was down to the last layer when Margaret arose.

"It's getting chilly," she said. "Will you folks come in?"

Masters was yawning and the two men took the palpable hint.

"Goin' to town?" asked Lurgan.

"I wasn't," replied Dick.

They said good night and passed down the path together, the girl and her father going into the house. As Lurgan grasped the horn of his saddle he swung the horse into Dick's which kicked viciously in return.

"That on purpose?" asked Dick quietly.

"It might be," said Lurgan, facing him with a sneer. "Why?"

"You've been bumping into me lately more ways than one and I'm getting tired of it."

"Aimin' to ride me off the ranch? It ain't goin' to be so easy, nor healthy either, Mister Kindergartner."

All the seething venom of the last hour came to the surface and Dick swung at him heavily.

Lurgan stepped back and Morton found himself gazing into the barrel of an automatic which the gambler had whipped from an arm-holster.

"Go ahead and shoot if you want to," said Dick. "I've no gun. Shoot, you crook."

Lurgan thrust the gun beneath his coat again.

"I was wrong," he said silkily. "I apologize. But you struck first."

"I don't carry a gun."

"I didn't know it. I apologize."

He held out his hand. Dick hesitated, then took it.

"All right," he said. "Good night."

"Look here Morton," said Lurgan. "Let's have this thing out sensibly. Ride on with me a piece an' talk it over.

Dick mounted reluctantly and they rode off together.

"You an' me got in wrong at the start," said the gambler with apparent frankness. "I should have known you was new in these parts an' you needn't have been so hasty about sizin' me up for a crook. I ain't. Without offense, I don't need to be, with your game. Here's the point.

"We both want the girl—don't get r'iled—it's the point. She ain't yours, is she? Well then, it's just possible—" he stroked his mustache complacently—"she might like me best. Anyway, we can't play our hands right with one overlookin' the other's game. Let one of us stand by an' give the other a square show without interference. If he loses he can step down. That's fair, ain't it? I knew her first.

Digitized by Google

Mebbe I ain't as solid with the old man, but I ain't courtin' *him*."

Dick looked at him silently. The chap was handsome, clever, he admitted. Margaret had said nothing, showed nothing in his disfavor. Nor was he without misgivings as to his own standing.

"It's fair, ain't it?" persisted Lurgan.

Dick nodded.

"Got a deck of cards over at your place?"

"I don't use them."

"Well, it's the best way to settle it. Leave it to the cards. We'll go to town and get a new deck. Play one hand, straight poker, or best two out o' three. Loser stands aside an' the winner plays. You can deal if you want to."

Dick hesitated. Lurgan laughed lightly.

"Afraid?" he sneered. "We won't tell her."

"One hand then, straight poker?"

"That's it. You're game. Let's lope awhile."

THE bartender entered the back room of the saloon with an unbroken pack of cards and the whiskies ordered by Lurgan, and set them on the table. Lurgan pushed the cards to Dick and raised his glass.

"Here's to luck," he said.

Dick set aside the liquor and drank the toast in water. He broke the stamp of the deck, threw away the joker and passed the cards across the table. Lurgan shuffled and returned them. Dick shuffled once more and placed them for the cut. Lurgan turned up a jack. Dick spilled two cards in his cut, replaced them and took the top one. It was a seven.

Lurgan laughed and deftly shuffled again.

"Cut for deal?" he asked. "Low card?"

Dick turned a queen.

"Queen of hearts, eh?" said Lurgan and flipped the top card, a five.

The deal passed swiftly from the gambler's fingers. Dick examined his hand anxiously. There were two queens—one of them the queen of hearts again—a nine of diamonds, a seven of clubs and a six of hearts.

The gambler skinned over his hand with practised precision, glancing at the index corners.

"Cards?" he asked.

"Three."

Lurgan dealt them, discarded one and filled from the balance of the deck.

Dick failed to restrain his satisfaction as he faced his cards. There were three queens now and two odd cards.

"Looks good," said Lurgan nonchalantly.

He turned over his own hand and spread them out.

"I caught it," he said, displaying two aces and three fours. He stood up, looking down at Dick who reached for his whisky and gulped it down, meeting Lurgan's eyes with a nod.

"You win," he said.

As Lurgan crossed the bar-room he stopped for a moment.

"Better take him in a jolt of rye," he suggested, jerking his thumb at the door he had closed behind him. "The kindergartner needs a brace."

IT WAS a month later when Sandy, returning from a trip to the borders of the Three Bar range, preparatory to the Fall *rodeo*, loped through the creek meadow of Masters' ranch on a short cut to the road. On the farther side of the stream he noticed Dick Morton's alfalfa purpling into bloom.

"Thet alfalfy needs cuttin' bad," he announced to Pete. "Whole place looks shy of work, li'l hawss. Wonder ef th' kid's slumped?"

Between the meadow and Masters' ranch-house, an orchard scrambled up the slope. As he neared the trees Sandy heard a sudden stifled call and caught sight of a blue dress. He wheeled between the rows as a man caught up with a girl, grasped her and held her, trying to bend her head back to his rough caress. As his dark head descended, Margaret heard the beat of hoofs, broke from him with a cry and came flying towards Sandy, while the man turned and disappeared through the trees.

"Oh!" cried Margaret, her color fled, rubbing at her throat fiercely with the back of her hand. "Sandy Bourke! I'm so glad you came. The beast!"

"Like me to ride after him an' hev a li'l talk with him? Lurgan, warn't it?"

"Yes. But don't do anything. It will only worry Dad. He won't bother me again. The coward!"

"There, li'l lady, you sure spoke a whole piece. I reckon he won't fuss roun' here no

Digitized by Google

more. Want to ride Pete up to the house? You're all het up."

He dismounted, the girl placed a foot in his palm and sprang lightly to the saddle, crooking a supple knee about the horn. Pete, nosing at windfalls, looked around inquiringly at his new burden, snorted welcome and walked springily up the hill, his master beside him.

"How's Dick?" asked Sandy.

The roses coming back to Margaret's face bloomed suddenly.

"I haven't seen him for weeks," she said.

Sandy's eyebrows went up, but he said nothing.

"He's—they say he's drinking," the girl faltered. "You're a friend of his—his best friend, he says. Can't you——"

"I ain't seen him fer quite a spell myself," said Sandy. "I've been over to the foothills. I thought he was a habit roun' here. Ef I ain't hornin' in, what's the trouble?"

"I don't know," her voice faltered again, then strengthened proudly. "He knows his own pleasure best I suppose."

Sandy shrugged his shoulders very slightly. He was shy and short of speech with women, a faculty he failed to rate at its true value.

"I'm goin' into town," he said. "Likely I'll see him. There's yore dad. Howdy? An' good-by to you, Miss Margaret. I'll be droppin' in for a chat soon, Masters."

At the road he turned to town instead of Haley's and jogged along, watchful for a sight of Lurgan. He was of a mind to have a little conversation with that gentleman if he caught a glimpse of him.

"I s'pose I'm hornin' in, li'l hawss," he said. "Allus tryin' to ride herd for the other feller, but I sure would like to palaver with Lurgan, jes' on my own account. Somethin' tells me he's a crook, sure as corns tell rain. He deals straight, cards ain't pricked or shaved, but ef a cow's horn is straight, he is. An' he wants to leave thet li'l lady out of his calculations from this min-u-et on."

But the gambler was not to be seen, and Sandy rode on until he recognized Dick's horse standing outside the Hackamore saloon. He found Dick in the back room reading his mail. A glass of whisky was before him and rings on the oilcloth attested that the indulgence was not the first of the afternoon. He greeted Sandy cordially enough, though his face was anything but cheerful, and there were grim little lines about the mouth and eyes that had no business there.

"Just in?" he asked.

"This min-u-et arriv'. I see yore alfalfy's doin' fine. I rode down the crick through Masters' place. Miss Margaret's lookin' great, ain't she?"

Dick reddened under his tan.

"I haven't seen her lately."

"Why, that so? I thought you an' her were reg'lar chums. Had a fuss with the ol' man?"

"No," said Dick shortly.

"She is cert'nly one fine li'l lady, Dick."

"Seen anything of Lurgan?" The boy tried to make the question indifferent.

"He went away jest as I come up," said Sandy. "I don't think he's turr'ble popular roun' there jest now. I aim to call there after supper. Better come along with me. I'll eat in town."

"I can't, Sandy. I've got an engagement."

"Aw, break it. See here, Dick. Here I go hornin' in again, but I introdooced you to the li'l gel, an' she's lonesome, Dick."

"I can't go there, Sandy, not yet."

"Why not?"

Dick hesitated, glanced at Sandy's grave and kindly face and said:

"I might as well tell you. It wasn't the right thing to do, mixing her up with cards. But, as you say, you introduced us, and I guess you've got the right to hear."

Sandy sat down and listened quietly as the boy told of his pact with Lurgan.

"He played square, too, Sandy," he ended.

"Sure," said Sandy. "But I'd call ef I was you. Lurgan ain't goin' there no mo'. He ain't popular, I tell you. I got it straight."

"I'll have to wait till he tells me."

Sandy looked at him sympathetically.

"It's yore game," he said. "Goin' to yore place for supper?"

"No. I'm stayin' in."

"May see you later. I've got a li'l business to attend to. So long."

"Game on tonight?" asked Sandy of the bartender as he bought some cigars.

"Surest thing you know. Some game. The kindergartner come-on stung Lurgan for three hundred last night, an' he promised him revenge." He grinned. "Goin' to take a hand?"

Digitized by Google

"Open game, ain't it?"

"That's the idee. All gents with cash welcome."

"Seen Lurgan ennywhere?"

"Hefty Bill, his pardner, was in just now an' said Lurgan was up to the shack. Just across the river."

SANDY rode thoughtfully down the dusty street and across the bridge that spanned the dry bed of the so-called river. At Lurgan's cabin he dismounted, shifted his guns so that they hung on his thighs forward of the hips, glanced in at the window, tried the door and walked in.

Lurgan was seated at the table writing. Cards scattered in front of him gave evidence of his daily practise. He looked up sourly as Sandy entered.

"You usually come in 'thout knockin'?" he asked.

"W'en I'm reel anxious to get in," answered Sandy evenly. "I aimed to ask a li'l favor of you-all."

"Did you now?" sneered the gambler, looking up at his holster which hung with his coat on a peg beyond his reach.

"They's two friends of mine," went on Sandy easily, sitting on a corner of the table and casually picking up the cards. "Boy an' gel. 'Pears like they's bin some misunderstandin' on account of a third party hornin' in where he ain't wanted. I thought you might get word to thet party an' sort of persuade him thet his chips wa'n't no good in this game. Savvy? Could you do thet li'l thing for me?"

Lurgan's swarthy face grew darker. He glared angrily at Sandy, meeting his steady gray eyes uneasily.

"Who in —— are you anyway, chippin' in where you ain't invited. You tend your own layout or I'll——"

"Who am I?" asked Sandy. "I'll give you my visitin' card, apologizin' for not sendin' it in reg'lar."

He chose the ace of clubs from the cards he was idly shuffling, walked over to the log wall of the shack, plucked out the tack that suspended a calendar lithograph and fastened the card in its place.

He stepped back to the table, Lurgan regarding him wonderingly. A spurt of fire broke from his left hip, two more from his right, the explosions blending as one, the big Colts sliding back into their holsters too swiftly for the eye to follow their action. He took down the card and held it up to the window. The three petals of the pip had been shot cleanly away.

Taking up the pen from the table he wrote in careful script above and below the bullet holes and handed the card to Lurgan.

"Sandy Bourke," it read, and then, below the center, "His Mark."

"In case you might fergit the li'l visit," he said, and left the cabin.

His horse stood with ears erect where he had left it.

"Startled, Pete?" he asked. "'Twa'n't nothin'. I jest bin scarin' a rabbit. A rabbit with the heart of a chicken. I've allus noticed, Pete," he went on as they loped to town, "thet a gambler who's a crook is allus a coward. We'll find out tonight ef it works both ways. You an' me, Pete, 'll eat supper at the hotel, an' mebbe I'll coax a chunk of pie for you from the cook, ol' sweet-tooth."

SANDY went in late to supper and lingered long, later redeeming his promise to Pete in the stable, munching oats.

"I'm ridin' herd tonight, li'l hawss," he announced as Pete licked his fingers for the last sugary crumbs. "I've sure got to git them two youngsters millin' before they stampede away from each other. Tell you all about it on the way home, you ol' Pi-u-te you."

There was a crowd at the Hackamore. The faro layout held a few players, but a knot of lookers-on surrounded the poker table in the corner, where Lurgan, Hefty Bill, a ranchman named Hendricks, 'Bo' Simpson from the Haley ranch, and Dick Morton sat intent upon the game.

Lurgan held the corner seat where none could overlook his hand. Before him the chips were piled high. The ranchman seemed to be holding his own, while Simpson and Hefty Bill were down to a sprinkling of red and white discs. Dick had a stack of blues in front of him, but Sandy shrewdly surmised that they were a recent and not an initial purchase.

Lurgan—out of the hand being played—was lighting a corncob pipe. Shoulders squared, keen and cool in his shirt-sleeves, he looked eminently the professional gambler, emotionless, watchful. Dick was

Digitized by Google

eager, chewing nervously at an unlit cigar. His speech was excited, a trifle thick with liquor, and his eyes overbright.

"I thought you were bluffing," he cried triumphantly. "But I had you all beaten anyway." He displayed three jacks vainglorioously. "Eleven measly dollars in the pot. Jus' 'nough for drinks 'round. Bring the gen'lmen what they want, Jim. Of course you had to stay out," he said to Lurgan. "Can't get a play out of you when there's a chance for one."

The gambler smiled imperturbably, laid down his pipe and gathered in the cards for a deal.

"Nothin' to play with," he announced pleasantly. "Your ante, Bo."

He caught Sandy's eyes, held them shiftily and nodded greeting.

"Heard you wanted to play, Mister Bourke," he said.

Dick looked up from his cards.

"'Lo, Sandy," he cried effusively. "Sit in. It's pikers' game so far. Kick in. My luck's just starting."

"Jes' as soon cut cards as play six-handed. I'll watch awhile," said Sandy. "Night's young. They's allus a chance as long as the chips don't git worn out."

"It's pikers' game," declared Dick, swallowing his whisky. "Let's raise stakes. What say? Make the blues five apiece. Make 'em ten. What say?"

The rancher and the cowboy demurred.

"All right, gen'lmen," said Dick. "'Tain't your angoras I'm after. Lurgan there wants revenge. He's still loser over last night."

"You an' me can bet on the side all you want to," said Lurgan, filling his pipe.

"You're on. Betch-you right now my next hand beats yours. Fifty dollars."

"No," said Lurgan. "That's not the game. No sense exposin' plays. When we're left in you can tilt me all you like."

Sandy watched the game closely but could detect no trickery, experienced though he was in the sleight-of-hand of professional gambling. He noted a few things, overlooking no move, however apparently trivial, of either Lurgan or his partner, Hefty Bill.

The high plays, with accompanying side-bets between Lurgan and Dick, came invariably, though not regularly, on the gambler's deal. Whenever Lurgan handled the deck he took the pipe from his mouth, laid it in front of him and dealt the cards across it with swift precision, coupled with an almost ostentatious display of fair dealing.

Once the play, before the draw, narrowed down to Hefty Bill who sat at Lurgan's right, Lurgan and Dick. It was the gambler's deal. Dick called for three cards, Hefty the same, Lurgan setting aside two.

It was not a large pot, though Dick, playing recklessly, had straddled the "age" and raised on his pair. Still it was a fair killing. But Lurgan, to Sandy's mystification, followed Hefty's example and tossed in his cards, ignoring Dick's side bet. Dick disgustedly showed three kings.

It was not Lurgan's method to hold up a kicker, Sandy argued to himself, nor to bluff on a two-card draw. When he held up three cards it was practically certain that he had threes. Yet Dick had come into the play on a pair and taken the pot without a challenge. Even with the boy's open methods and foolish display of winning hands, it seemed strange that Lurgan could gauge his cards so accurately.

Sandy glanced at the men standing behind Dick. He knew all of them as unlikely to be in collusion with the gambler nor could he detect any signals. That some code might be exchanged between Hefty and his partner seemed probable, but Simpson sat between Hefty and Dick. Sandy was puzzled. He felt certain that somehow Lurgan had foreknowledge of Dick's hands, particularly on his own deal.

He caught Simpson's eye and made a motion with his head. The cowboy sat back, speaking to his foreman.

"Want to take my hand?" he asked. "Guess I'll cash in."

The exchange was made, Sandy taking over the chips.

"Tha's right, Sandy," said Dick. "Now le's make it a real game. Raise the limit."

Hendricks had struck a run of steady, though not phenomenal luck, and made no objection this time, and, Sandy consenting, the chips were checked and the value raised.

"Have a new deck, Mister Bourke?" asked Lurgan.

The pack was brought, and, on Sandy's deal, he took special care to assure himself that they had not been tampered with. The play grew high, Sandy holding his own, Hefty trailing along, Hendricks winning an occasional pot, Lurgan adding to his pile

Digitized by Google

and Dick steadily losing or getting no play for his hands. Twice he bought a stack from Lurgan, scrawling a check for the amount.

Sandy had expected Lurgan to show some special disposition to tilt with him when occasion offered, but the gambler played a steady game to the value of his cards, except when he evinced an uncanny knowledge of Dick's hand. All his purpose seemed centered in a desire to win from the boy.

To the bystanders, in the knowledge of the revenge Lurgan was supposed to be seeking for the previous night's losses, nothing out of the way was happening, and Lurgan's success was attributed to his superior play. Hendricks, ahead of the game, showed no suspicions.

At last Dick, examining his check-book, announced himself as buying his last stack. Sandy caught a furtive gleam in Lurgan's eyes and watched him still more zealously. Calling for cigars, he offered them to the table. Lurgan refused.

"Prefer the pipe, thanks," he said suavely.

"You're not smokin' it," suggested Sandy.

Lurgan looked at him carelessly.

"It's a habit of mine," he said putting the cold stem back in his mouth. "It's my mascot."

LURGAN, Hendricks and Dick were presently left in together on the play, Sandy dropping out on a blank hand and Hefty tossing his hand to the discard with a grunt of disgust. It was Lurgan's deal again, and Hendrick's age, with Dick straddling and perversely raising before the draw. He took one card, the rancher three and Lurgan the same.

Dick bet heavily, Lurgan raised, the rancher meeting it. Dick raised again and the play went on. Hendricks dropped out on the second lift and, at last, Lurgan, sizing up his opponent's chips, raised to the limit.

Dick, with a drunken laugh, shoved forward his pile.

"You may's well have them all," he said. "I'm through." And he displayed an unfilled straight, open at both ends.

"Thought you were bluffin'," sneered Lurgan. "Pair of bullets."

The rancher gave a little shrug of chagrin.

"Guess I'll quit," he said and commenced piling up his chips. Dick laughed again uncertainly.

"*I've* quit all right," he said. "I'm clean. You got your revenge, Lurgan."

"That breaks the game for me," said Sandy, still convinced of crooked play, but unable to place it.

They cashed in, leaving the lion's share with Lurgan, a heap of chips, coin and bills, with Dick's checks among them.

"Want some revenge yourself?" he asked Dick, as the latter still held his chair.

"I'm clean, I tell you. Nothing doing! You've got my last loose red, white, blue and yellow."

"You got a ranch, ain't ye?"

Sandy laid a hand on Dick's arm.

"Comin' my way?" he asked. "I'm ridin'."

"I'll put up five thousand against your ranch interest," said Lurgan. "Make it a *man's* game. Five hands, a thousand a throw."

Dick looked at him, his flushed face gradually paling, his jaw setting firmly.

"You're on," he said. "You keep out of this, Sandy."

Sobering rapidly, he tore out a blank check and wrote quickly on the back of it. "Will this do?" he asked Lurgan.

The gambler read it aloud.

This represents as face value for five thousand dollars my whole and entire interest of Ranch 91, Masters' Division, Steerville, Nevada. Payable on sight to bearer. (Signed) RICHARD D. MORTON.

"It'll do, I guess, with witnesses," said Lurgan, piling up his cash and checks and adding to them from a thick roll of bills. "Check this if you want to."

"Gimme your paper an' your fountain-pen," said Hefty Bill, and affixed his signature. He passed the paper to Hendricks.

"I'll not get mixed up in this," said the rancher. "Your holding's worth a heap more'n that. You're crazy, Morton."

"That's my business," replied Dick doggedly. "Sign this, will you, Sandy?"

Sandy took the pen, slowly wrote and passed the check to Lurgan. He had drawn an ace of clubs with the words, "Sandy Bourke, His Mark."

Lurgan gave him an evil look.

"Thanks," he said. "Much obliged."

Hendricks got up.

"The kid's plumb crazy," he announced. "I'm goin'."

Digitized by Google

Another man took his seat and the onlookers gathered closer, holding a tense silence. Lurgan, leaning back in his corner, pushed his stake to the center of the table and lit his pipe.

Sandy, checking the pile, dropped his unlighted cigar from his lips and bent suddenly to pick it from the floor.

"All O. K.," he said, finishing his count. "Five thousand, includin' yore checks, Dick."

They cut for the deal from the first of five decks brought in from the bar, and Lurgan won. Each hand being played for a straight thousand, there were no preliminary nor after bets. Dick called for two cards, Lurgan taking three without bettering his hand, and losing on a pair of tens against three fives. The crowd shuffled and exchanged comments as Dick dealt and won the second hand. Sandy watched the emotionless gambler like a hawk. The luck swung back, and the fourth hand saw the two even again.

"Let's have some action," said Dick.

"Meanin'?" asked Lurgan.

"The whole thing or nothing."

The crowd murmured and grew quiet again as Lurgan broke the stamp and took up the cards for the last deal. They began to sense that there was something more than money at stake between the gambler, slightly smiling under his mustache, and the tense, white-faced youngster. Those back of Dick leaned over to overlook his hand. There were two kings and three useless cards. Lurgan set down his pipe, dealt the three cards called for, threw away four of his own and filled his hand from the balance of the deck.

"Well?" he asked, replacing the pipe in his mouth.

Dick showed his original kings, a jack, a seven, and a six.

"No good. Two bullets."

Exclamations broke from the crowd while the boy sat rigid and Lurgan reached for the stakes.

Sandy suddenly rose in his seat.

"Keep your hands jest where they are, Mister Lurgan," he said. "An' tell this fat pardner of yore's to keep his hands atop the table. You've seen me shoot. He ain't—yet."

He plucked the pipe from Lurgan's mouth and held it up.

"Here's the li'l trick, gents. Mister Lurgan's mascot. I been lookin' for somethin' all evenin', an' when I dropped my cigar I caught sight of what I suspicioned. This is what they call in Alabama the L'il Spy. Used to work it on the river boats, reg'lar. Take a look at it."

He held the corncob aloft for their inspection and then laid it on the table.

"Deal a hand or so across it," he suggested. "You may not be as quick on the job as Mister Lurgan, but you can see how his li'l mascot works.

The pipe held in the hollow heel of the cob a tiny square of mirror, angled so that when the pipe lay on its side the cards could be read by any one dealing over it. The crowd passed it from hand to hand, Lurgan sitting still, reaching forward, one palm either side of the stakes, under the menace of Sandy's quick-firing methods as already demonstrated in the little shack by the river.

"See here," said Sandy, turning over Lurgan's discards. "He deals Morton there two kings. He *deals* fair enough, becos he knows I've bin watchin' him all evenin', an' he deals himself two queens an' a lone ace. The queens ain't good enough, so after he fills Dick's hand an' *knows* he ain't bettered his kings, he draws down to his lone ace an' makes it. Mebbe he slipped one off at that, though I didn't see him, but he's bin knowin' right along *what the rest held every time he dealt!*"

"How much you loser, Dick?" he asked.

"About eighteen hundred, aside from the last."

Sandy took up the checks, noted their amounts and added some bills.

"This clears us," he announced. "You-all can have a li'l session with Mister Lurgan on yore own accounts. Nice thick roll he showed jest now. They's one thing more I want to say to you, Lurgan, before these gentlemen hev' their li'l argument, an thet is, to be sure an' take the train East termorrer afternoon, you an' thet cornfed sidewheeler of yore's. Thet's on another count, an' I'll be along to see you don't miss it. Come on Dick, let's be movin'."

AT FIVE o'clock the next afternoon, Sandy dismounted from Pete at Masters' gate, and reaching the porch sat down wiltedly on the steps.

"I'm shy to licker as a rule, Masters," he said, "bein' partickler as to the brand. But I'm sure all het up an' dried out."

Masters laughed.

Digitized by Google

"It's a special occasion today anyhow," he said. "We're kind of celebratin'. Margaret, she sent in an' coaxed some ice from the packin' company for ice-cream an' it's on the back porch now roun' the freezer. Ef you could snake out a little, I could find two long glasses, some straws an' a bottle that is warranted not to corrode, anyways. Also, you know where the mint bed is."

Returning from the spring-house, Sandy noticed a blue gown through the lattice of the grape-arbor. It seemed trimmed curiously about the waist with a white sleeve, apparently filled. Smiling, he tiptoed past, to be hailed by a cry from the lovers.

"We've been hoping you'd show up, Sandy," said Dick. "I've told Margaret all about it and—it's all right," he concluded, replacing his arm.

"Want me to break the news to Dad?"

Margaret shook her head.

"It's broken, and mended again," she said.

"Not to be hornin' in, when's the weddin'?"

"Thanksgiving," said Dick. "I'm going to try and get my folks out. You'll be best man, Sandy."

Sandy shook his head.

"I'm aimin' to hit the trail right after *rodeo*," he said. "Me an' Pete's homesick for Texas. It's the rovin' heel."

"Please?" pleaded Margaret looking at him intently.

Under the tan and freckles of Sandy's face rose a tide of crimson slowly. When it reached his eyes he dropped them as if they had been submerged.

"No use," he said. "I'm sot. I'm the original human maverick, Miss Margaret. Now me an' yore dad's goin' to drink yore health."

He showed his sprigs of fragrant mint.

"How about Lurgan?" asked Dick.

Sandy grinned.

"Travelin' East, fast an' light. The boys sure gave him a great send-off. 'Stead of three cheers they give him a ridin' lesson—in a blanket. Waited till the train come in an' histed him free an' often. He sure got all the raises to the limit. The boys got to laughin' though an' got careless, an', on the thirtieth raise or so, they missed him comin' down. But he's sure qualified for an avia-tor!

"Send me a piece of cake, Miss Margaret—enough for two bites. I'll share it with Pete, ef you don't mind."

The next adventure of *Sandy Bourke* will appear complete in the August issue.

PLUCK

By C. Hilton-Turvey

WHEN the cards go against you and Luck turns her back,
And the winning card's hid in the depths of the pack,
When you needed an ace and they dealt you a jack,
And you're left far behind as an old almanac—
Don't throw down your hand. Do the best you can do,
And—see the game through!

When your plans have gone wrong and your luck's on the blink,
And the future looks black as a good grade of ink,
When there isn't a dime in your jeans left to chink,
And you're tempted to jump o'er Eternity's brink
With a shot or a draught—that's unworthy of you!
Wait—see the game through!

For there's always a chance, though you're losing today,
That triumph will follow your present dismay.
Luck will taste all the sweeter because of delay.
But whether or no, here's a chance to display
The stuff your soul's made of—the best you can do.
Come! See the game through!

Digitized by Google

The REFORMATION of CARABAO

By Robert J. Pearsall

Author of "Anting-Anting."

"STEAM-YACHTS and automobiles and aeroplanes," mused Carabao, in a sort of ecstasy of regret. "Hot birds and cold bottles, maidservants and manservants, a brownstone front on Fifth and a Winter home in hula-hula land. No, nothin' doin'. I'm up the pole—jigger on that bottle, the corporal's lookin'—but if it wasn't for the innocent trustfulness of my nature I might be poppin' corks the rest of my life to the tune of a rapid-firer, and my pile never give out.

"Yes, we've come from Palupan, and we're four days over-time, and we've brought no good-conduct medals with us. Undesirables, Captain Brackett called us; and you'll find no man of the five of us blamin' him. Undesirable we were, especially in a post three hundred miles away from a brig or a court-martial board or a chance of a bob-tail. From the day we mixed in that Ilongote wedding-feast and made away with the bridal trophy—a Caygayan head it was, nicely toasted in the sun, with its brown skin stretched so tight from cheek-bone to jaw that we used it to drum out its own funeral march—from that day, I say, I saw our transfer comin'. Cavite for us, and swift kick-outs on our first offense. And, mind you, we were proud of our iniquities. Hard nuts, we considered ourselves.

"And what we wouldn't do to Sergeant Gaspel on the march—you knew him, you say. Then I hope you know him again. The smooth-tongued, pink-cheeked, fluffy-ruffled, hand-shakin' Shylock! If I had him here I'd shove his own two feet down his throat till he choked. Judas was a saint to him, and Ananias the original truth-teller. And we thought him a mark and a come-on. Yah! Innocents unborn!"

"Him in charge of us!" said Rummy Wilson, the morning we left. "It'll be us in charge of him before we're many hours away. We'll take him in safe; we won't hurt a hair of his innocent head; but we'll make him see that the army's a place for men, and not for white-blooded nincompoops. And we'll have four days for it—or six or eight, if we like. It'll be We, Us and Company that sets the pace."

THAT first day's hike was a scorcher. Thirty-five miles we went—yes, I said thirty-five. No, we weren't in a hurry to get any place. Fact is we intended to loaf to spite Gaspel. That was to be part of his hazin'. We figured he'd try to make a record. But no sooner had we topped the first hill and got a glimpse of the country ahead of us—white lava against black rocks, piled in heaps like it'd been dumped from the devil's stone-crusher—than he began to advise us to take it easy. That changed our plans quick. Hikin' is two-thirds heart, and he'd lost his, and we'd walk him down. We'd hike him till his feet dragged the dust, and then we'd laugh at him. Him that preached in non-com's school on how much better cold-water hikers were than *vino* drinkers!

Digitized by Google

The sun rolled up the sky for all the world like a white-hot ball, the wind died down, the air took to quiverin' before our eyes like water in a pot that's about to boil, the rocks blistered our feet through our shoe-leather; the dust, where it'd settled in the lowlands, rose up in clouds and caked our faces and pestered our lungs. We sweated and panted and choked on at a pace that would have led to mutiny if anybody else had tried to set it for us.

We expected Gaspel to object; but he didn't. He fell behind a little, though, and his wheezin' came to our ears most distressful. Oh, we'd have got him, we'd have got him; or we'd have busted—the record, you say! Jumpin' Calithumpians, I never thought of that before! D'ye suppose it was a trick? D'ye suppose there was *that* much ingrown meanness in him. Us workin' our legs off to win him a record? Jack, you're a friend of mine; but for your own sake, don't tell me that. This yarn's pitiful enough as it is.

By night we'd reached the top of the Aguasin range. We didn't have any energy left for cookin'. Corned beef and hardtack; shoes off; blankets spread on the ground, and us rollin' ourselves in 'em like so many cocoons. No sentry, which wasn't regulation; but Gaspel didn't need any serpent-like wisdom to know that none of us were scheduled for guard duty that night.

It was young Lamar that woke me up. "Carabao, Carabao, Carabao," kept poundin' on my ear-drums, with me tryin' to get away from it and back to sleep again. Finally I gave up and came alive, to find it broad daylight, with Lamar huggin' the ground alongside of me.

"'Ssh!" he whispered, and pointed across me to the north. I rolled over, and see what ailed him.

THREE gugus were single-trailin' along within a hundred yards of our sleepin'-chamber. Which of itself wouldn't have mattered; but each of the three carried a rifle at the balance and a wicked-lookin' bolo swingin' at his side, and, as you know, firearms among natives is a sign of pernicious activity these days in northern Luzon. I began to unwrap myself from my blanket.

"*Ladrones!*" I grunted, reachin' for my rifle.

"Betcher. Help me wake up the rest."

You've seen the bunch. So you'll know that Rummy woke sudden, with his little black eyes squintin' half-angry and suspicious till he saw who it was; and the Hunyak slow, with his snorin' changin' gradually into grunts as his eyelids pried themselves open; and Breen normal, so to speak, with a joyful sort of grin spreadin' over his face as he saw what the trouble was like to be. But Gaspel, who was the last man to be aroused, came up quiet and businesslike, though by that time the gugus were out of sight around a cliff.

"Got t' get them rifles," he said annoyed-like. "'Gainst the law. Too bad; lose time. Keep your shoes off; hang 'em around your neck. Which way d'they go?"

We showed him. He took the lead, and we followed, amblin' along like tender-footed Indians. Somebody said something about an ambush; but when we reached the cliff the backs of the natives were still to us. Our rifles came up like one, coverin' them.

Gaspel yelled something that sounded like an explosion. First time we knew he savvied their lingo. They halted and whirled and stood starin', their faces goin' mottled-muddy and worried-lookin'.

"Keep 'em covered," said Gaspel. Then he turned loose some more vocabulary. The biggest of the three gugus answered him, talkin' rapid and fast, like he was protestin' at our audacity in stoppin' them. But it didn't affect Gaspel none.

"Stand by to receive arms," he said to us. "They claim they've got some sort of authority to carry 'em, but we'll see about that afterward."

He snapped another command at them. They began sheddin' their weapons reluctantly, layin' them on the ground. Then Gaspel jerked his hand at them, impatient, and they edged up to us, slow-like, their faces growin' worrieder every minute. I knew there was something else on their minds besides their rifles. The leader said something more and started to reach inside his *sarong;* but Gaspel stopped him with a word like a pistol-shot.

"No knife-drawin' on me," he said, and proceeded to search them. It was little enough trouble, considerin' that the clothes they wore between the three of them could've been carried in the flap of a haversack.

Digitized by Google

EACH of the gugus wore a red silk sash tied loose around his waist, just above the bolo belt. Gaspel felt around the sash of the leader and pulled out a plump canvas sack, about the size of a quart measure. At that the man began to remonstrate most vociferous; and before he could be stopped he completed that motion into his *sarong* and jerked out a sheet of official-lookin' paper, which he shoved under Gaspel's nose.

The curiousest, eager, puzzled, tryin'-to-think-quick look came over Gaspel's face, and he stood for an instant hesitatin'. But something about the sack—maybe the way it dragged down Gaspel's hand when he first got the weight of it—had caught Rummy Wilson's attention. He stepped forward, and said, quiet-like, but forcible—

"If it's the same to you, sergeant, the rest of us would like to have a look inside that."

By his face, Gaspel was as reluctant now as the gugus. But we crowded up, backin' Rummy. . Of a sudden there was something mighty interestin' about that dirty, bulgy bag. Gaspel shot one calculatin' look at us and then undid the string, with the gugus jabberin' like mad all the time. And six pair of eyes popped.

You've seen gold, I know, tamed gold. You've seen it after it's been minted into coins and rolled into finger-rings and twisted into fancy shapes to match a dude's necktie. But did you ever see the dust of it? Did you ever see it, all smooth and beautiful and innocent, fresh as it came from the bed of the stream, with all its eternity of mischief ahead of it and none behind? If you've not, you've missed the real temptation of it. I tell you that gold smiled at us with a thousand eyes—and no woman in the world has but two. And each gugu carried a sack of it.

Three sacks of dust, and there were six of us. No, we could count Gaspel out. Gaspel wouldn't loot—but what was to be done with him? No matter, something must be done with him. But there were five left. That was too many. . . . I caught up my thoughts, like a man stops a runaway horse, and looked around at the others.

Lamar was grinnin' delight, like the boy he was; the Hunyak's eyes were narrowed, and his lips drawn back from his teeth; Tim Breen—ah, there's no race like the Irish—his face was a-beam with pure love of whatever was to come; but Rummy Wilson's jaw was set and his face muscles hard, and he was starin' at Gaspel and the gold with a cold light in his eyes, like a gambler figurin' cards. A glint had come to Gaspel's eyes, too, as he looked at the gold and then at us; but the natives were pullin' at his sleeves, and he turned to listen to them.

"*Der geld!*" muttered the Hunyak, hardly breathin'. "Ah-h!" and he licked his thick lips. He seemed to have forgotten the rest of us. "*Der geld!*"

"'Th' shillalahs at Donnybrook Fair,'" hummed Breen. "How far is ut to th' Mint?"

"There's ten thousand dollars' worth there," spoke up Lamar in a voice that seemed somehow out of place, so frank and fresh and boyish it was. "I seen it weighed once, in Colorado. Runs two hundred and fifty dollars to the pound."

Rummy Wilson didn't say anything, only stared at the broad of Gaspel's back, like he'd see through it to the gold.

Then Gaspel whirled, and his face was pale and white by turns, and his eyes were gleamin', and he was growlin' curses that I'd never heard him use before. Curses against the natives; and 'twas well he controlled himself so they couldn't even get the tone of his voice.

"What is ut?" asked Breen, pushin' up to him.

"The dogs!" snarled Gaspel in a rage. "The black-hearted, black-skinned reptiles! Men, I've just heard a story that'll make you all glad there isn't one in this party that *isn't* a man. Come over here and I'll tell you. I had to threaten to shoot 'em to get it out of 'em," he says, "and it's shoot 'em I'd like to do, and the rest of their infernal tribe."

Then he continued. His exact words were too dramatic for me to handle. Every now and then he'd stop a bit, choked with his emotions, or lookin' for words to express them in, or maybe lookin' for emotions to express.

IT WAS the story of the gold, of how the natives come to be packin' it. This was the way of it. . A month before there'd been a typhoon along the coast, and a ship had been wrecked and beaten ashore almost due west from where we stood. A white girl—the natives called her the White Water Angel for her looks—

Digitized by Google

and her father and brother were the only ones that reached the beach alive. The men didn't last long after they'd landed, it bein' sea-pirates that picked them up.

But them same pirates havin' more regard for wealth than beauty, the girl'd been kept alive and safe, and offered in the Luzon matrimonial market. The chief of all the Igorots had bid her in. The gold we'd gloated over was the price she'd fetched, and the three gugus was the deputation sent to pay for her and take her back to their royal black master.

Woman — wealth — and the choice between! The gold or the girl? Imagine it—and us 'steen per month privates with jungle-bred appetites for loot!

Before Gaspel had finished, the air was fair quiverin' with trouble. Rummy Wilson's face was twisted and stubborn; the Hunyak seemed fillin' with a slow sort of puzzled anger; Breen's smile had gone; and Lamar had flushed, with a straightenin' of the back and a throwin' back of the head. But Gaspel went on, as if there could be no man of a different mind than him in the crowd.

"The only question is the way to get her, of course. And the only way to get her is to keep friends with these gugus. They either can't or won't tell me where she's kept. But they're goin' there, and we'll go with them. So back the gold goes to them, boys," and he gave it back. "And I shake hands with these sons of Satan, and I'd much rather bash their heads together. We'll give them back their arms too—but keep your own loaded, chamber and magazine—and now I'll tell 'em that it's our duty, bein' responsible for the keepin' of law and order, to see that they and their gold reach their destination safe from Tagalog *ladrones*."

Which I suppose he did, the rest of us not bein' able to understand. When we see they were comin' to an agreement, we moved to one side.

"—— the luck," growled Rummy.

"Oi'm agreeable t' that sentiment," said Breen.

"Are we to lose that gold because of a girl that none of us ever seen?" asked Rummy, encouraged-like.

"Ain't we?" asked Breen, lookin' him in the eye.

"Wat's tha gurl?" grunted the Hunyak. "A' want tha gold."

"You do, do you, you slab-footed sheepherder," flared up Lamar. "To —— with the gold, that's what I say, and any of you that claims to be white——"

There was the beautifulest chance for a split, for I could see that Rummy was nervin' himself to side with the Hunyak. But Lamar had raised his voice, and Gaspel whirled like a flash.

"That's enough of that, Lamar," he said. "We're all white here. That isn't sayin' we wouldn't like our fingers in that gold. I would myself. But the girl's first. First with all of you, she is, and I know it."

What was there about him, I wonder? Was it just because he so plainly *expected* the Hunyak to nod his head that he nodded? And Rummy, and myself, too, though I wasn't nowise settled in mind. Anyway, things were tided over, and we got started.

GASPEL asked the natives how far it was. Two days, they told him. They led the way, settin' a rather easy pace. The new course too was easier than the old, over great brown hummocks and billows of rock, fallin' away slow toward the west. But the sun was as hot as ever. It fair parboiled us in our own sweat, which is how we escaped toastin'.

But I wasn't noticin' that much. Say, did you ever fight with yourself, hand to hand, breast to breast, tooth and nail, claw of desire against fang of conscience, so to speak—fight for hours, round after round, and feel every bout a draw? I wanted that gold—Lord, how I wanted it!

I dreamed dreams over the spendin' of every dollar of it, and there were ten thousand of them, and every one was studded with jewels of delight. And there were a billion girls in the world, but only one I. Every man for himself, said I—oh, I'm givin' it to you straight.

And yet the fool other side of me wouldn't stop fightin'. Maybe I didn't envy Breen and Lamar, swaggerin' ahead with shoulders back and head up, proud of themselves. They knew what they wanted. And so did Rummy and the Hunyak, for all their hesitatin' agreement with Gaspel. But I was like a man in a whirlpool, facin' every way at once.

Then what does Gaspel do but drop back alongside of me, take a squint or so at my face, and throw the way to get the gold wide open for me!

Digitized by Google

"I'm goin' to place a guard tonight," he said. "Men I can depend on. Breen and Lamar and you. Order'll be to allow no one to leave the camp, brown or white."

And he looked steady into my eyes. I'll never trust a man again that does that too easy.

"Good plan," I agreed.

"Only way," he said. "Gugus might slip out on us. Don't think I'm afraid of Rummy and the Hunyak; they're good fellows. But three men are enough; there'll only be six hours of it. Thought I'd tell you."

"Have you got any plan yet?" I asked. "What are you going to do?"

"I wish I could get some more information from the gugus, but I'm afraid of makin' 'em suspicious by askin' questions. So I've figured it this way. We'll keep with 'em till we get right close to the village; then the rest of you stop, and I'll go on alone.

"Once in the town I'll find where the girl's kept, and when these fellows are to leave with her, and what course they're to take. Then I'll come out to you, and we'll either lay in wait for them in the jungle or try to take her from the town—whichever seems best. Or I might get a chance to get her away myself. What d'ye think of the idea? I'm lookin' for a better one, if I can find it."

Mother of Moses, what a man he was! How could he have known just the weight that was needed to overbalance the scales? I worried no more over what I'd do or wouldn't do.

I stood guard that night, and along toward the middle of my watch the Hunyak crept over to me. He'd be satisfied with a third of the gold, he said.

Everybody else was asleep, and it'd be but a touch of our rifle-butts on the heads of the natives. There was shippin' from San Fernando to Hongkong, and we knew that every boat wanted white men. And the way I answered him!

"Look at Gaspel, him we used to call a dog-robber and a mitt-glomer and worse. D'ye know what he's figurin' on doin' tomorrow night, while we're keepin' our precious hides safe in the brush? Am I to be a poorer make of a man than him? D'ye think I'd turn him down after he's trusted me? D'ye think he'd turn us down?"

What a blitherin' idiot I was!

I HAD the mid-watch, relievin' Breen, while Lamar relieved me. Lamar woke us up at sunrise. Eats, and we were off again. The gugus told Gaspel that it was still a long day's hike to the settlement; we'd get there some time after dark. Also, none of us havin' any better plan to propose, Gaspel finally settled on the one he'd described to me.

The Hunyak and Rummy, havin' seemingly given up hope of gettin' at the gold, fell in with it fairly cheerful. As for Breen and Lamar, every step they took was set to the time of "The Conquering Hero Comes." And I won't say that I didn't feel some thrills of romance and triflin' speculations myself. White Water Angel! What a name that was to set a man a-dreamin'.

We were gettin' toward the coast. Our trail was full of perversities—cliffs and ridges and contrary-minded obstructions—but mostly it took us downhill. By noon we'd reached the jungle, and a hard bit of hikin'.

Cogon grass as high as your head, shrubbery considerably higher and almost as thick, brambly vines weavin' through it all like spider-webs, marshes thick as paste with water-weeds, steamy heat, flies in swarms, mosquitoes half the size of your finger-nails. No breeze, no air, leaves and branches matted over our heads like green blankets. How the Igorots found their way I don't know; instinct, I guess, like a cat.

They led and we followed, and even after dark we kept goin'. Then the way cleared a bit; there came a hill, another steeper one; and when we reached the top of this there was the sound and smell of the ocean ahead of us, and below us, not half a mile away, the street-lights of a native town.

Gaspel stopped and talked a bit to the natives. Then he turned to us.

"This is the place," he said with a little shake in his voice. "These gugus claim everything's safe ahead—that the fact that I've protected them will protect me—but if it isn't, good-by. If it is, I'll see you before mornin'. If I don't come back, there are still five of you, and you're senior private, Breen—and San Fernando, where you get the boat to Manila, is seventy-five miles south." And he followed the natives into the darkness.

"By the Lord Harry!" breathed Breen, "There's a man for ye. Who'd have thought it uv him?"

Digitized by Google

"Reckon we misjudged him," admitted Rummy. "There's not many would do as he is doin'. Makes me feel mighty small, sittin' here; but he's the boss. It's a decent-ish-sized village though, ain't it?"

It was. By the lights it covered near a square mile, and the shacks were laid out in rows, regular. A hum of voices came up to us, and a bit of string music. Then we gasped, all of us together, for a big bass voice boomed out, singin' American:

"He rambled into the army, he rambled out to sea,
He rambled to the Philippine Isles, a —— of a place to be;
Then he rambled, he rambled——"

"WHAT the dickens——" Lamar began. But he'd no time to finish nor the rest of us to think. Things began to happen.

There was a blood-curdlin' yell, like no white man ever gave, soundin' half-way between us and the town. We jumped to our feet, heard two rifle shots, ran toward them, and came slap-dash against Sergeant Gaspel, runnin' in the opposite direction.

He never stopped.

"'Bout face!" he hissed. "It's a trap! Come on; get out of this." And he broke through us toward the brake.

We brought up quick, jabberin', bewildered, turned and followed him on the jump. As we came up with him, we heard a splutterin' excitement begin in the town behind us, like a human volcano about to erupt.

"Hear 'em?" half whispered Gaspel. "They'll be after us in a minute. The girl? How do I know? All I know is that they jumped me. Yes, the three gugus. Made a miscue, though; I got two of them—other got away. Take it easy there, *easy!* Yes, we'll come back, maybe; but we got to run now. We can't fight the whole tribe."

That was a scramblin', tearin' getaway. You see, we had to make time, for the natives could follow our trail plain as print by daylight; and we had to go as quiet as we could or they'd follow it then by the sound. That was the reason Gaspel gave for forbiddin' unnecessary talkin', even whisperin'. The rest of us didn't live up to that rule exactly; but he did. Except for orders, he wouldn't open his mouth, even when we asked him to tell us more about his fight with the natives.

We began to leave the shoutin' and confusion behind. By and by they died away altogether. That encouraged us. If we got to the hills, we could soon lose our pursuers. Then back at them again, from another angle, for we hadn't given the girl up yet. The girl and the gold, too—that'd be too much.

We couldn't see anything. We kept in touch with each other mostly by sound. Sometimes where the underbrush was thickest we crept on all-fours, close up, like a thirty-foot snake with an interchangeable head and tail. For, of course, the leader's part was the hardest one, and none of us kept it long. And then our tail sloughed off altogether.

None of us knew exactly when it happened. Lamar noticed it first, when he dropped back from the front to the rear and passed only four men. He whispered a word along the line, and we stopped and counted up. Gaspel was gone.

Good old, game old, faithful old Gaspel! He must've been wounded all the time, kept up as long as he could, and then dropped out quiet, rather than be a drag on the rest of us. But would we desert him? Not while we wore khaki! We doubled on our track and back we went; but we didn't locate no Gaspel. Pretty soon we realized that we weren't even locatin' the back trail.

A man's sense of direction is an unreliable thing, particularly after you've made two or three turns in a pitch-black jungle. I never blamed Breen, though I'd have gone the other way myself, several times.

WHEN mornin' came we were still neck-deep in the cogon grass. We stopped to eat, and didn't get started again immediate—and the next thing I knew I opened my eyes to find a white man dressed in the uniform of captain of Scouts beatin' the devil's tattoo on the soles of my shoes with a sword.

"Come out of it," says this apparition. "You're under arrest. Line up!"

The other four hearties were lined up already. Mighty uncomfortable they looked, and no wonder, for a whole company of Americanized Tagalogs were standin' guard over them, holdin' their new Springfields at the ready. Our own rifles were neatly stacked to one side, out of reach.

I took my place, quite easy in mind myself after the first surprise had passed away. For, after all, what better luck

Digitized by Google

could we ask for? A little explainin' and this arrest nonsense would be forgotten, and the captain at our backs. A trim, soldierly lookin' fellow he was, fit for the regulars, and his men as clean-cut and brown as Ghurkas.

"Who's in charge here?" he asked.

"I am, sorr," said Breen.

"What's your post?"

"Cavite, sorr. We're afther bein' transferred from Palupan."

"You're a long way off your route," says the captain. And then, sharp, "Where's the gold?"

"Gold!" echoed Breen stupid-like.

"Yes. Come! One of you got it. We've been chasin' you all night. Where is it?"

For a minute Breen didn't speak. I saw his face turn pale and then flare sudden red, like a gobbler's. Then—for I was a little slower to sense what the captain's words meant than Breen—the rest of the world seemed to go red, too, and I heard Breen's voice through a roarin' like a waterfall.

"Mother uv Hiven! *We've* got no gold! But wud ye moind tellin' who ye are and where ye come from and phwat's th' gold ye be pratin' about? No disrispict, Captain, but *wud* ye moind tellin' that?"

I suppose it was Breen's voice, choked with earnestness, and maybe something about the looks of us all, that made the captain answer him straight.

"I'm Clifford of the Scouts," he said, "and I'm stationed at Balangiga, which is the town you ran away from last night. And the gold is the semi-annual shipment from the placer-mines of the Illocas, which one of you got away with, after knockin' two of the bearers cold and tryin' to strangle the other. Though why you waited till then, when you had them to yourselves for two days, *is* a thing I can't rightly understand."

There was a sort of mournful awe in Breen's voice when he spoke again. "Thin you're in charge at Balangiga?"

"I'm in charge of the military."

"And there ain't no pirates there?"

"What d'ye mean, man?"

"And no beautiful shipwrecked American girl, no White Water Angel, no—nothin'?" I never heard a man's voice so wistful-like.

"Come, cut that. Are you sunstruck? Where's that gold?"

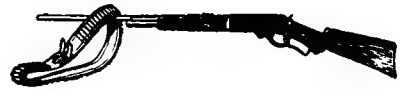
THEN Breen forgot who he was talkin' to and blew up like an overheated ammunition chest.

"Divil a bit I know where it is, excipt it's in charge uv a man that'll be prince uv this earth whin th' Father uv Lies come into his own. And Oi'm not sunstruck, but if I was Oi'd be in betther consate wit' meself."

With that he fell to usin' language concernin' the duplicity of Gaspel and the quality of his own intelligence that brought the blush of shame to the cheeks of the captain, and kept the rest of us silent from the pure foolishness of tryin' to match with him.

And so it was—and there's your scut of a son of a sutler that was called Sergeant Gaspel, and that's not been caught yet, though they've got his description in every seaport this side of the date line. Every time I think of him I'm forced to respect myself by way of contrast, which is one of the reasons I'm off the *vino* stuff and goin' straight from now on.

Besides, when I do a thing I like to do it, and that there experience showed me depths of villainy I never could hope to reach, not if I lived to a thousand. And third and lastly, this world's a small place, and the five of us have some information about *Mister* Gaspel that ain't in his descriptive book, and when our final pay-day comes we want it to be big enough to put us on his track and keep us on it. And when we get him—say, we'll make striped suits and barred sunlight look mighty attractive to him, and the stone walls of Leavenworth loom up like a haven of refuge.



Digitized by Google

The WHIP HAND

By Thomas Addison

Author of the "Come-On Charley" stories.

IT WAS ten o'clock of a blazing August morning when Mr. Jack Everett, in cream-colored flannels and some anxiety, set out from his hotel on his first visit to the *Times* office. He had come down into this southern country not of his own volition, but because his father had condemned him to it. It was an outrage that must be stoically endured for the very potent reason that his monthly allowance was at stake.

To hark back for just a moment, it should be recorded here that Everett Junior's occupation hitherto had been principally girls and polo; and while these pursuits are absorbing they are devoid of fleshly nutriment—they do not furnish the grapefruit for breakfast or the fruit of the grape for dinner, to say nothing of the roast. In brief, Mr. Jack Everett was magnificently equipped for spending money, but had entirely neglected the art of earning it. His father had now undertaken the eleventh-hour job of remedying this defect. He had summoned the young man to his office and held converse with him there as follows:

"I'm going to give you a chance to show what's in you, if there's anything," he said grimly. "Here's the proposition: I hold a blanket mortgage for twenty thousand dollars on the Hampton *Morning Times*. Stephen Carleton, the owner of the *Times*, died suddenly some weeks ago, and I'm informed his maiden sister is running the paper and making a mess of it. She's backing Pickens for governor instead of Morse, the present incumbent. And, by George, she's turned the sheet into a suffragette organ!"

"She must be very old—or very young," was Jack's languid comment, at which Everett Senior grunted.

"Carleton was fifty. His sister may be older. At any rate, I don't think she'll disturb your dreams. Your business is to set this woman right—make her do a flip-flap and get back in the traces. If she bothers you, throw her out. Foreclose and run the shop yourself. Save what you can from the wreck, and don't show up here till you've done it. You'll find detailed instructions in this envelope. A child could understand 'em, and perhaps you can."

Jack took the envelope and arose. He stood looking down at his father from five feet eleven.

"Everybody knows any fool can run a newspaper, dad," he remarked composedly. "The question is, what do I get for all this work?"

"Get?" his amazed progenitor roared. "Get? Why, confound it, sir, you get your allowance cut to nothing if you don't do the work! You've got to earn that four hundred a month hereafter or—" he qualified a present impossibility—"at least make the pretense. Here!" He shoved another envelope at Jack. "Some time ago Carleton sent me these documents for safe keeping. He said I might read them, but

Digitized by Google

I never have. They've something to do with the politics of his infernal State. Go through them on the way down. And I'll give you a file of the *Times* to take along. You ought to land in Hampton chuck full of valuable information."

And with an unfeeling grin Everett Senior cast his only child to the brazen Moloch, known in these latter days as Business.

ONE did not walk abruptly into the editorial Presence of the *Times* under Miss Elizabeth Carleton's rule. There was an antechamber and a boy who must first be passed. The boy—who, for his age, looked painfully well scrubbed and desperately conscious of it—came forward, took Jack's card, and disappeared with it through a door at the farther end of the room. Presently he reappeared and motioned Jack to enter, standing mutely by to close the door. He was, in truth, an alarming boy, for not once had a sound escaped him.

Jack stepped in—and stopped uncertainly. This was no dried and dreary spinster whom he saw. It was a young woman, possibly twenty-three; and she was sitting at a flat desk near the window, scanning him with an air which had something of defiance in it. She was all in white, except for a black bow at her throat. And her hair was copper-brown; it glinted in the light that fell on it from the window.

"Will you come over, Mr. Everett, and take a chair?" invited this young person coolly.

"I—I beg your pardon," stammered Jack, crossing to her, "but I expected to see——"

"Yes," said the girl evenly, "most people do. I am Stephen Carleton's half-sister and next of kin. Our father married the second time late in life. I have been living up North, but came down to take charge of the paper. I was on the Boston *Sun* for awhile."

"Oh, I see," murmured Jack inanely.

She was looking full at him across the desk, and he was fascinated by her eyes. They were wonderful—amber-hued and long and wide-set; and the brows were dark and straight. They put his wits out of gear—he felt them slipping cogs, and to the havoc of his mental mechanism.

"I suppose," said Miss Carleton, mercifully breaking the silence, "you have come about the mortgage, Mr. Everett?"

"Thank you!" Jack replied explosively. "On my word, I didn't know how to broach it."

His gratefulness was plainly so sincere that the girl smiled slightly. Then the crimson curve of her generous mouth tightened, and a little frown of worry gathered between her eyes as she looked away through the window at the glittering dome of the distant State House.

"You see," went on Jack tumultuously, "father thought somebody had better come down and talk things over with you. He—he didn't know just what your plans were, and he thought that perhaps he could give you some assistance. Anything he can do, you know——"

He finished with a gesture that could be read to embrace Everett Senior's uttermost resources. Miss Carleton's face flushed with surprise and pleasure.

"Why, how kind of him!" she exclaimed.

Her eyes were glowing pools of amber, and to Jack mendacity became a rite.

"It's simply business. He can't afford not to help you," he lied blithely.

"Oh, but he could! The Morse crowd would buy the paper in for twenty thousand in a minute. When William brought me your card I was afraid you had come to sell me out. I'm supporting Judge Pickens, the Progressive candidate. The primaries are held next week, and we are hoping to win out, though I fear it's doubtful."

"Yes, I know," returned Jack. "I want to consult with you about that. Your brother was backing Governor Morse. You must have had a good reason for switching to Pickens. Do you mind telling me what it was? I'm representing father, you know—speaking for him."

"It's perfectly simple," she answered. "Morse politically is a rascal, and Pickens isn't. That's the reason."

"It's holeproof," agreed Jack soberly. "Sound as sanity. I noticed in this morning's paper that you trimmed Morse pretty close to the cuticle. Aren't you afraid he'll get back at you—libel?"

The girl's eyes flashed.

"Let him try it! I don't think his record would stand an airing."

"No," said Jack, "I don't think it would. Your brother was aware of that. He had the whip hand of Morse; and just about this time in the campaign I think he would have shown it. He was after the State

Digitized by Google

printing. There's a profit in it of twenty-five thousand dollars. It would have cleared the *Times* of debt. That's the reason Carleton backed Morse."

"How do you know this?" The girl's voice was eager.

Jack felt in his coat pocket and drew out a long white envelope, but replaced it with some haste. It contained the "instructions" from Everett Senior. He drew out another envelope, of manila, and took from it a number of documents. He was about to speak when William came in. He walked over to Jack and handed him a lettergram, and walked out again, as silent as the midnight watches.

"From father, of course," remarked Jack; and with a request for indulgence he opened the dispatch. He read it to himself. It ran:

> On second thought better foreclose anyway and get back to Morse. Quick. He's got the goods. Keep me posted by wire.

"Dear old boy—father," observed Everett Junior easily, as he interred the message in a pocket. "He says we must get Pickens's promise to give you the State printing."

"Oh, but——"

"Allow me, please," interrupted Jack glibly. "Here's the stuff to make Pickens come across." He tapped with his finger the documents he had spread out on the desk. "This is all your brother's work—a detailed exposure of Governor Morse's malfeasance in office, and supported by affidavits, by Jove! It's proof! And Morse can't get away from it. If it's published it will elect Pickens in a flying jump. Run it over, will you please?"

He handed to her several typed sheets fastened with a clip.

"Do you mind," he asked, "if I use your telephone?"

SHE placed it at his disposal and began to read. Jack hunted up Judge Albert Pickens's law office in the directory. He found it was close by—in fact, just over the way from the *Times* building. Miss Carleton looked up with a startled air when he asked for the number.

"What are you going to do?" she questioned.

"Invite the judge to step over here. Campaign business."

"But——"

Jack put his hand over the transmitter with a quick movement.

"I've got him," he said to her.

And then he talked to Judge Pickens. He told him that something of the last importance had come up, and his presence to discuss it with Miss Carleton was imperative; his election hung upon it. And without giving the honorable gentleman time for personal inquiries, Jack rang off.

Miss Carleton's brows were drawn together in a resentful frown.

"Why did you do that?" she demanded coldly. "I have nothing to say to Judge Pickens."

"I was speaking for father," explained Jack. "'Tis telegram, you know."

The frown faded gradually.

"Of course," said the young woman, "I wish to carry out your father's wishes as far as possible, but it doesn't seem right to sell the paper's influence."

"Hasn't Pickens promised you anything?" Jack's tone was a bit insistent.

"Wh—yes. He has promised to recognize the Movement."

"The 'Movement'? Oh, yes—women's suffrage. Good! It's a great cause. You pledged him to it positively, I hope?"

"Yes."

"Made it a consideration for your support?"

Jack put the question smilingly. Miss Carleton colored.

"Y-yes, to an extent I did," she acknowledged lamely.

"Well, then——" Jack shrugged expressively.

"But this is different!" cried the editor in defense of her act. "It's not like asking for money, or an office. It's not—sordid!"

"I'm glad father can't hear you say that," grinned Everett Junior. "I'm afraid he'd laugh. He'd tell you it isn't different; that you're in the same boat with a thousand other papers. You see, it isn't always cash or office or plain advertising patronage they sell their support for. Oh, no! It's swapping interests—giving you something you haven't got in exchange for something they haven't got, things that don't carry common price tags sewed to them."

"Yes, but——"

"Oh, I know it isn't ethical, but it's the way the game is played these days; and if you want to win you've got to follow the rules. Hypocrites are out of fashion.

Digitized by Google

Mighty few of us here below do anything now except for an understood *quid pro quo*. Even those who walk the straight and narrow path do it for the promise of flowery meads beyond."

He laughed at her shocked expression.

"It's not nice, is it? But it's better than humbuggery. One at least knows where one stands."

"You are telling me as politely as you can that I'm a hypocrite. But I'm supporting Pickens because he is the best man. I'd have done it anyway, if he hadn't promised me."

Jack laughed again, unrestrainedly.

"Yet you were shrewd enough to bargain with him. That would tickle father to the point of prideful tears. My dear girl—I beg your pardon; I can't feel toward you as a stranger—my dear Miss Carleton, don't let us be satisfied with a mess of pottage; let us require of the judge a square meal. Will you read while I write? He may be here at any minute."

He drew paper and ink to him and fell to work with the pen; and Miss Carleton, after a moment's hesitancy, obediently turned to the Morse impeachment. She had just finished reading it when Judge Pickens, a giant man, was ushered in by the aphonous William. Jack, who was blotting his production, laid it aside and rose. Miss Carleton introduced him to the judge, taking pains to state the Everett interest in the paper. This seemed to bewilder the candidate for gubernatorial honors.

"Er—uh—I imagined it had something to do with the Morse editorial this morning," he said ponderously. "It has stirred things up considerably."

"No, it has to do with this," asserted the editor, holding out to him Stephen Carleton's statement.

Judge Pickens took the document and deposited his great bulk in a chair Jack had placed for him by the desk. He adjusted his glasses, ran a hand through his shock of iron-gray hair, and began to read. Presently he straightened up and read on with absorbed attention. While he was thus engaged Jack passed across the desk the sheet of paper on which he had plied his pen.

The judge at length laid the statement down.

"Here are the affidavits, sir," said Jack.

The big man scanned them closely and laid them alongside the statement. He rumpled his hair again and regarded Jack keenly.

"Well, sir, what's the program?" he queried.

Jack waved his hand in the editor's direction.

"That is for Miss Carleton to say."

"Well, what is it, Miss Betty?" urged the judge with fatherly indulgence.

"It's a question, Judge Pickens," replied Miss Betty evenly. "If I print that story Morse will be as good as dead, politically. It will elect you governor."

"Yes, yes! But you haven't put your question!" exclaimed the judge.

The girl looked at Jack. He secretly and studiedly winked at her.

"Speaking for father," he offered pleasantly, "I'd like to see the mortgage on this paper paid. I don't want to foreclose and place the *Times* in alien hands. Miss Carleton's policy seems to be agreeable to you, Judge Pickens—isn't there something you could suggest that would give the *Times* a lift?"

The judge shifted his position to one of greater ease. As he had suspected, it was pap they were after.

"Is that it—the question?" he asked the editor.

"Yes," she answered, rather low.

He came back at her bluntly.

"Well, Miss Betty, what do you want? The State does considerable advertising, and—er—I'll see that you get your share—the lion's share," he added a little hurriedly, noting the cold reception given this proposal.

Betty Carleton placed before him the paper Jack had passed to her.

"I want you to sign this, Judge Pickens," she said deliberately.

The candidate read it and made a sound that was between a grunt and a groan.

"You want me to sign this agreement to appoint you the State printer? Impossible! I can't do it!"

The editor's eyes narrowed. The judge's tone was slighting, she thought—disparaging, derogatory. It aroused her fighting instinct. She leaned over to him and said:

"The *Times* had given you the heartiest support of any paper in the State, Judge Pickens; it is recognized as your mouthpiece. And this is so because it believes you would make a better governor than Morse. Now

Digitized by Google

it needs your assistance. The necessity has been forced upon it. You will appoint some one State printer and you won't do it out of brotherly love. You will do it as—as a *quid pro quo*. You can not deny that I have given you my best. Now it's up to you. What are you going to do?"

"Not that," muttered the Judge. "I can't do that!"

MISS CARLETON swept together the statement and affidavits lying at the other's elbow and handed them to Jack.

"Take them back to New York, Mr. Everett. We have no need for them here," she declared.

Jack grinned and made a pretense of sorting the papers. The judge showed his alarm. He addressed the editor with paternal kindness.

"My dear child! Don't you see that what you ask is impossible? It's beyond all precedent. The State printer a woman!"

Jack's grin widened. But the editor's eyes glowed ominously.

"Judge Pickens," she returned, speaking very distinctly, "you have promised your support to the Woman's Movement. If you are afraid of breaking precedents you will be afraid to support a cause that is smashing precedents. If, on the other hand, you really do believe that I—a woman—am qualified to vote, why, then, am I not qualified to hold a voter's office?"

The judge rumpled his hair in a state of mind he had not experienced in many a day. Mr. Jack Everett was ostentatiously replacing the papers in their envelope, and the judge saw his sure election fading into nebulous uncertainty. He cleared his throat and remarked:

"Er—uh—you are right, Miss Betty. I promise you the appointment."

"Sign it, please," requested the girl, shoving the agreement at him.

The judge straightened himself.

"My word, Miss Carleton, is my bond," he declaimed with orotund impressiveness.

"Speaking for father," interjected Jack soothingly, "I wouldn't accept my own grandmother's word, when it comes to politics. I'd make her sign and seal and kiss the Book—and then some, if I could think of it."

The laugh with which he sought to cover this ultimatum was cut short by the violent opening of the door and the appearance on the threshold of a young man, deadly pale and evil-looking. A step back of him stood William, solemn and silent.

"Tom Morse, what do you want?" demanded Betty Carleton. Her voice was tense.

Judge Pickens skewed around in his chair toward the newcomer. Then he sat perfectly still, his face slowly losing its color. He was not a coward, but he knew that Death was near him. Jack Everett, not understanding, glanced at the girl opposite. If she wished this intruder removed, he was prepared to do it. But her eyes were on young Morse.

He was swaying in little broken circles, and put out his left hand to the door-jamb to steady himself. His right was in his sack-coat pocket. He made no reply to Miss Carleton; he addressed Judge Pickens.

"I've been looking—for you," he said thickly. "I've got something to say—to you."

He paused, scowling, trying to collect his thoughts. The judge, without moving so much as a hair's breadth, spoke in a tone but just above a whisper to Jack, sitting directly behind him.

"Mr. Everett! Get out of the line of fire, sir."

Jack understood now. The judge was at the mercy of this drunken boy, who was armed and inflamed to the point of murder. The least move would be the signal to shoot. Yet in his deadly peril the judge had warned a not too pleasant stranger to drop below the desk. It thrilled Jack, even in his own great peril; but he did not stir.

"That piece this morning—in the paper—about my father—is a lie,——you!" spurted out Tom Morse jerkily. "Do you hear—you—Pickens there?"

He took a step forward from the door. William took a step forward in his wake. The judge said nothing—it was useless. But not so Betty Carleton. She got up with measured deliberation, and placing herself between Morse and the judge walked over toward the door. A pace away from Morse she halted.

"I wrote that editorial, Tom," she said quietly. "I'm responsible for it. And you can't come in here and intimidate me. If Governor Morse wants vindication let him go to the courts. And you—you'd better go home."

Digitized by Google

She faced him squarely. She had grown up with him in Hampton, and knew that he was reckless, lawless and uncontrolled. And she knew what he held there out of sight in his pocket.

"Go home, Tom," she repeated, "and go to bed."

He sneered at her wickedly.

"You keep out of this, Betty Carleton. If you wrote that—lie—I know who put you up to it. He's got to answer for it—Pickens there. Get away!"

He reached out to push her aside. As he did this, Judge Pickens raised himself up from his chair, and Jack, with a cry, leaped toward the drink-crazed man.

There was a flash over Betty's shoulder, a report—and then Jack saw Morse go sprawling on his back on the floor, with William clutching at the pistol that had fallen from his grasp. The boy had flung himself headlong at Morse's knees and brought him down.

"William Connors," said Judge Pickens, an instant later, "I am in your debt. I shall not forget it, sir."

He took the boy by the hand and shook it gravely. Then William spoke.

"What shall I do with this, sir?" and he held up the pistol.

A RUSH of hurrying feet broke in on them. A handsome man with white hair and white imperial strode into the room. Other men—from the street, from the city-room, from the composing-room—thronged behind. The white-haired man came to a sudden standstill as he saw the prostrate form on the floor.

"Tom!" he cried. "Tom!" and gazed around at the company.

"He's drunk, that's all," said Jack curtly.

He was holding a handkerchief to his cheek, and the white linen showed red stains.

"Governor Morse," flamed out Betty, who was leaning pale and shaken now against her desk, "you will please have your son removed from this room—instantly!"

Two of the men at the door, without waiting to be asked, came forward and between them dragged the wretched boy to his feet and bore him off. The governor motioned the others back and closed the door. William had retreated to a far corner. Judge Pickens stood aloof over by the window.

"You are hurt, sir!" exclaimed the governor, approaching Jack.

"It is nothing—only a scratch," asserted Jack bruskly.

"I was afraid of this—afraid of it when I heard Tom was drinking," said the other heavily. "I tried to find him. He is a weak, wayward boy. I can offer no apology sufficient to excuse him. I have nothing to tender you, sir, except my deep regrets. Miss Carleton"—he spread out his hands in deprecation—"I can only say the same to you. I am without words to express my sorrow."

There was something that appealed about this man standing there white-haired, humbled, robbed of fatherly pride; but, woman-like, Betty Carleton could not all at once forgive him for his son's sin.

"It is not to myself, Governor Morse, but to Judge Pickens your apologies are due," she told him coldly. "Tom came here with the fixed purpose of killing him."

The governor bowed his head.

"Yes," he answered, and walked slowly over to his rival. "You haven't a son, Judge Pickens, for whom you must sue for pardon—an only son!" He looked down at the floor and went on: "He has no mother, and I—I failed him. I did not control him. I did not set him the right example. I failed him. And now he has failed me—my only son!"

"Governor!"

The big man stepped forward and thrust out his hand. The chief magistrate accepted it, and they stood eye to eye.

"Judge Pickens," said the Governor presently, "I have something to say to the voters of the State. This day has decided me. I am done with politics—through! I am going to save my boy; it is the only thing worth while to me. The rest—is nothing."

Then this man, master of a great political machine, did what an hour before the fulminations of all the press could not have dragged from him—he renounced his power. He sat down at the desk and wrote a few lines rapidly, and signed his name to it with sweeping strokes.

"You may print that, Miss Carleton, with the other happenings of the day," he stated as he rose.

He paused uncertainly, as if debating further speech. Then, with an abrupt "Good morning," he took his leave.

Digitized by Google

Betty silently read what the governor had written. There was a little catch in her breath when she said:

"The *Times* will carry no story of the shooting, gentlemen. Governor Morse has withdrawn his candidacy."

For a moment the room was still. Then Judge Pickens said:

"About that agreement, Miss Betty. I am prepared now——"

"Pardon me, Judge," cut in Jack quickly. "Speaking for father and myself—and I am sure for Miss Betty—we prefer your word to any bond you could execute."

The Judge drew his huge form up and bowed.

"Sir," he responded, "I thank you."

He turned to the girl. She was looking with troubled eyes at the red stripe athwart Jack's cheek.

"Miss Betty," bowed the Judge, "my dear child—" he glanced from her to Jack —"I—I bid you good day, my dear," he ended lamely, and moved away.

Miss Carleton hastily withdrew her eyes from the object of their contemplation.

"Success—governor!" she called after him brightly.

The judge wheeled and ran his hand through his hair.

"Upon my soul! It looks like it, doesn't it?" he returned; and with another bow he wheeled again and this time passed out.

William came forth from his corner. What his thoughts were no man could tell. He walked toward the door as solemn and as silent as an undertaker anticipating the arrangements for his own funeral.

"Oh, William!" cried Jack and, as the boy stopped, he added, "You're a born halfback, William, and if there are any other little chaps as good as you around here we'll organize a junior eleven this fall and clean up things."

"Thank you," rejoined William seriously. "What shall I do with this, sir?" And again he held up Tom Morse's pistol.

"That? Why, I fancy you've learned how not to use it—so keep it," Jack decreed; and William noiselessly went out.

When they were alone Betty Carleton pointed a trembling finger at Jack's wound.

"Sit down and let me dress it," she commanded.

"It's nothing—really," Jack assured her. "Barely roughed the skin."

"Sit down, please," she repeated, "and let me see."

He obeyed with a laugh. She fetched water from a stand behind a screen and fluttered over him, bathing the wound and drying it with soft, cool hands. Jack, looking up, caught a glimpse of tears in her eyes.

"I was thinking of your father," she excused herself. "If——"

"Good old dad!" exclaimed Everett Junior warmly. "I haven't been worth my salt to him and, to be honest with you, he sent me down here to get a little business sense banged into me. I've made a start today; it would tickle him to death if you'd let me stay and keep a-going."

Betty began bathing the wound all over again. After a pause she remarked, quite casually—

"Of course you are speaking solely for your father?"

"Well," confessed Jack, "about one per cent. for father and ninety-nine for self."

There was another pause. Then—

"The *Times* needs a business manager——"

"I accept!" Jack told her earnestly. "And now I'll telegraph to dad. It'll cost him something, for I've got a lot to say."

Digitized by Google

The DOVE WITH A BROKEN WING

By Talbot Mundy

Author of "Hookum Hai," "The Soul of a Regiment," "Gulbaz and the Game," etc.

CHAPTER I

PIGGY WIMPOLE HAS THE GO FEVER

PEACE time is an army's greatest problem; it is so, and always has been, everywhere. But in India that is more particularly the case because Tommy Atkins has practically no civilian friends with whom to amuse himself, and almost no white girls with whom to fall in love. He finds himself isolated, between natives who despise him, and whom he looks on with contempt, and people of his own race who hold themselves very far above him both because they have to and for many other reasons.

So, in India he becomes really and truly Tommy Atkins; and that is something different from any other breed of man there is. Needless to say, it is a good breed, or England's Empire would be something smaller; for it is Tommy Atkins—the unpromoted rank and file of him—who really won that Empire and now holds it "with the bay'nit an' the butt." But, left to himself and with himself to quarrel with, Tommy Atkins is sometimes a little difficult to handle.

The Nil Desperandums were a case in point. They had festered and rotted down at Oozepore until the Secretariat had winced at the awful sick returns, and only the brewery was pleased. Then somebody was reprimanded, another, healthier regiment was sent to the stinking fever-country, and the Nil Desperandums, much too sick and slack to march, were railroaded to Poona and reasonable cool and healthy exercise.

So much was well and good. For nearly a year the regiment submitted with good grace and growing wholesomeness to the strenuous business of being polished. The canteen profits fell away to almost nothing, and the musketry returns began to look so good that the Adjutant wore a brand-new atmosphere of freedom between his shoulder blades.

"There's nothing wrong with Tommy Atkins," said the Mess in unison.

"After all, he's the best thing in the world," declared the Senior Major.

"Yes," said the Colonel—and he was a conservative, exacting sort of man—"after all—and of his kind—and taken in the main—he is."

But there was a host of reservations

Digitized by Google

included in those two words "after all." The effects of Oozepore and idleness had not died down as yet, and showed few signs of dying down. Even football, and cricket, and inter-company and inter-regimental boxing championships had failed to get the men together yet. There were still the surly little cliques that drank together and snubbed the men of other cliques; and though the better climate and the exercise were having their effect on them, the only signs of breaking up so far were quarrels within the cliques themselves. The re-fusing process, on a healthier basis and a larger scale, had not begun.

THE hottest of all the combinations in the regiment, and by all consent the most unbreakable and most exclusive, showed signs now of disintegration. Ambitions had begun to creep into all three members of it, as the after-effects of Oozepore and too much beer and lassitude crept out. And of course, since no men are alike, ambition took them differently.

The "go fever" got into "Piggy" Wimpole's veins—the dogged, jaw-set restlessness that has peopled half the earth with Cockney-born. He squatted native-wise one morning, when parade was over and most of the men were scattering about in little groups, alone under the enormous mango tree that overlooked the cricket ground. A clay pipe stuck out from underneath his scrubby black mustache, and the crows' feet at the corners of his eyes were lined deep as he frowned at the earth in front of him.

He did not move, or look up even, when "Farmer" Wells stepped out of the sunshine, stared hard at him for half a minute and then slackened every inch of his white clad six-feet-two and sat down beside him with a thud.

"Baccy?" said Farmer, loosening his tunic and producing a clay pipe.

Piggy tossed him a pouch but did not look at him. His dark fringe of hair, worn Cockney-wise, had fallen down below his helmet almost to his eyebrows; his face was nothing but a black frown, and the corners of his mouth were set tight—tighter than Farmer Wells had ever seen them. And Farmer had seen Piggy under most conditions, fighting on an empty stomach in the cold, among others. This mental attitude was something altogether new, or else the *n*th power of an old one.

Farmer dived into his pocket, jingled in it for a moment, and produced one quarter-anna. He tossed it to Piggy with a flick of his thumb, and it fell between his knees at the exact spot on the ground where his eyes were staring.

"What's that for, fat'ead?" demanded Piggy, still not looking up.

"For your thoughts. I'd nothing smaller."

Piggy sat around with a jerk and faced him. He pulled the pipe out of his mouth and pointed at Farmer's huge chest with the stem of it.

"You've got a gal to think of," he sneered. "Think of 'er! You're playin' for promotion, an' gettin' married on the strength. Think o' that! Anybody knows what your thoughts are, you great lumberin' helephant. John pity the poor gal what marries yer, an' John pity the reg'ment what 'as you for a sergeant!"

"What you want, little man," said Farmer, leaning past him and recovering the coin, "is a dose of Epsom salts. I offered you too much for that little lot. 'T ought to be t'other way 'round—I ought to charge you for the advice."

"Salts!" said Piggy, pushing out his lower jaw. "Want salts, do I? Listen 'ere. What I want 's a fight. What d'yer s'pose I joined for? D'yer think I joined to sit about in this 'ere blasted Poona, an' watch you an' Joe 'atchin' mysteries where there ain't none?"

JOE TEMPLE was the other of the three, and Piggy was a little jealous of him yet. He had accepted him readily enough at first, but later, as Joe and Farmer became more intimate, he had grown resentful.

"It's my belief Joe's an 'alf breed! 'E ain't never been to England; 'e 'listed out 'ere, 'e talks the bloomin' lingo like a bleedin' bazaar sweeper, an'—an' for all you or I know 'is mother was one. 'Im an' you makes a fine pair!"

Farmer smiled a little grimly underneath his golden-brown mustache, and looked for a moment as if temper were getting the better of him. His enormous fist was clenched; but that was only his way of betraying worry.

"Joe's father was a sergeant in the Middlesex, and his mother was born in England," he answered quietly. "Joe enlisted

Digitized by Google

for the same reason that you did, little man —to get a roof over him and a coat to wear."

"Ho! 'E did, did 'e? An' you? I s'pose you joined out o' charity, to 'elp the bleedin' army?"

"It's a good job for one little dock rat that I did enlist," said Farmer pointedly. "I've seen a heap o' rookies in my time. I've seen 'em drafted in by the dozen and the fifty and the hundred, an' I've helped belt 'em into a proper sense o' things. But you were the worst, Piggy. You were the rookiest, rawest specimen that ever drilled in a billycock hat."

Part at least of what Farmer said was absolutely true. Since the first six months when he himself was grinding through the recruit course, he had been one of those invaluable soldiers who help to mold the rest —unpromoted for a host of reasons, of which laziness was not the least, but utterly dependable when sober, and for that reason always in good favor.

"I wish I was back where I was then," vowed Piggy. "Hi joined for the fightin'. Hi joined in the 'opes o' seein' service, not to sit down in this 'ere blasted India an' do nothin'. War's what I want—red, bloody, guts-an'-shrapnel war; dead 'orses an' shriekin' men, an' vultures wheelin' over'ead, same as we 'ad it in Afridistan! That was good, that was. That suited me no end good. On'y it didn't last long enough, worse luck. Gimme that again, an' I'm 'appy; on'y let's 'ave it 'ere—right 'ere in India, down among these 'ere blasted babus what's always preachin' about the dove o' peace."

"They're right, little man," said Farmer, who had seen more service than Piggy had ever dreamed of seeing. "They and the missionaries, they're both right. The dove o' peace is the soldier's best friend."

"Bah!" said Piggy. "The dove o' peace is a lousy, good-for-nothing fowl what can on'y sit an' scratch 'isself an' lay eggs!"

"He's laying one now," said Farmer quietly. "That's the point, my son. Joe and I have got the nest marked down."

"You an' Joe! Joe an' you! You're a fine pair o' beauties, you are! What you've found 's a mare's nest, an' what you'll get out of it 's a good dose o' plague, an' serve you right. Listen 'ere. White men what goes nosin' in an' out o' the bazaar—" he jerked at Farmer with his pipe-stem, and clutched one knee tight with his other fist —"white men what talks 'Industanee for choice an' spends all their spare time 'atchin' plots, ain't white men no longer, nor fit company for white men. No they ain't—any more than a soldier what talks o' gettin' married is a soldier. 'E's a swab; 'e's a soft-'earted, chicken-livered swab, that's what 'e is."

"Soft-hearted," said Farmer, "is as good a guess as you've made yet, Piggy. I don't know any other reason why I don't go over you with a belt, good and proper too. However, here comes Joe. Tell him what you've just told me, and see how he takes it."

"Joe Temple be sugared!" said Piggy, as Temple's long, lean, almost ascetic looking figure strode toward them from across the cricket ground. Piggy squinted at him hard through puckered eyes, like a horse dealer judging points before a bargain.

"'E's slack in the back an' 'e's got weak knees. 'E talks like a black, an' 'e thinks like one, an' 'e's got you 'ypnotized for fair! I'm sick of 'im an' I'm sick o' you—an' I'm that sick o' the perishin' paths o' peace, an' of India, an' the 'ole business. I'm fit to bust. I'm off to find a man what's got some man'ood in him. *Good*-by!"

HE GOT up with a jerk, tugged his tunic straight, whacked the calf of his leg with his swagger cane and started off in the direction of the barracks without another word. He had barely reached the cricket pitch when Temple dropped down beside Farmer Wells and struck a match. The two of them lay still and watched the straight-backed Piggy strutting straight away from them and swishing at his right leg savagely.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Joe Temple.

"Nothing much," said Farmer. "Got 'em again, that's all—got 'em bad. Wants dosing."

"Got what?"

"Sulks."

"What's he going to do?"

"I could guess," said Farmer thoughtfully. "What's more, I'd bet on it. He's going to chum with 'Satan' Sims. When he's this way, he always picks out the dirtiest swine in the regiment that happens to be out of clink. He and Sims 'll make a good pair just at present."

Digitized by Google

"But that won't do. We want him. Man alive, we'll need him."

"And we'll have him," answered Farmer. "Don't you fear. He'll be back in lots o' time. All Piggy's looking for 's a fight, and he's going to find one. If he licks Sims that'll do 'em both good, and if Sims licks him it'll do Piggy good anyhow."

"Yes, and if Piggy gets into cells, what then?"

"Oh, as for that," said Farmer, "what if we all do? What's the good of crossing bridges before you get to them? Have you got the news yet?"

"Yes, got it from the mess-sergeant ten minutes ago. The Viceroy comes Thursday week."

"Good!" said Farmer. "Then on Friday morning I'm lance-corporal. Wish you could come in too, Joe. Tell you what, let's toss for it."

"Not me! You're taking all the risk. You get the loot in the promotion line; that's fair. If there's any money in it, it's agreed we share and share alike."

"Of course there'll be money in it," answered Farmer. "Come along; let's go down to the bazaar again."

It did not occur to either of them for one minute to suggest that Piggy should be left out in the cold when it came to dividing up the "money" there would be in "it," any more than it would have occurred to them to take another partner in their scheme in Piggy's place.

CHAPTER II

THE BAZAAR RECEIVES SOME WHITE VISITORS

THERE is always in every regiment, just as in every other walk of life, one man at least who richly deserves the cognomen of Satan, even if he does not get it. Only, in the army, where men live close-packed in forced intimacy, and politeness is anything but superficial, people of that stamp get found out and pushed into the light and labeled sooner and more certainly than in other spheres.

So, Sims was known and not promoted. Satan is an inadvisable pet title for a man who wants to be a non-commissioned officer. He was a clever fellow—much too clever; and, as the rank and file alleged, "a sight too good looking;" and that is another distinction that is no sure key to popularity.

As a matter of fact, in a regiment, the only sure way to be liked is to be likable, from inside. A clever man, such as Satan Sims, for instance, can easily fool one man, or a dozen; but a regiment of men will nose him out and bay his secret iniquity for all the world to hear as surely as a pack of hounds will scent and yelp behind a fox. They will give no reason for it necessarily, but they will show no hesitation; and the more brains that individual has, the less consideration they will show him.

And Satan Sims had worse than merely brains; he had a long, vindictive, multiplying memory. He remembered, for instance, a thrashing he had had some years ago from Farmer Wells. It had been thoroughly deserved; but it had also been thoroughly attended to, with a pair of fists that hurt like dumb-bells, and the memory rankled. So, instead of forgetting the incident as any wise man would, Sims was clever and remembered it, and—five years after the event—was quick to seize what seemed a favorable opportunity for getting even, and a trifle more than even.

Piggy Wimpole was voicing his discontent with Wells to highest heaven. Piggy, of course, knew all of Farmer's weaknesses and all his plans. Piggy seemed to Sims like a God-sent means for vengeance, who only needed sounding carefully and coaching shrewdly to be used; and Sims overlooked what Farmer Wells had spotted on the instant, that the little man was only spoiling to let off steam. It never occurred to his evilly imaginative brain that Piggy might cultivate his friendship with a view to having a just ground for fighting him.

And Sims was much too clever to consider, even, the idea of retaliating on Farmer with his own fists or anybody else's. He believed in light-fingered, delicately done intrigue; and from the moment that Piggy told him, with raucous derision, of Farmer's newly found ambition for promotion, Sims saw the grim humor and the feasibility of plotting and procuring the exact opposite, and getting him in cells.

He became very friendly with Piggy Wimpole, and listened by the hour to Piggy's dissertations on the big man's character, and applauded them; but he was much too clever to take Piggy quite into his confidence, or to begin to show his

Digitized by Google

hand in any way at all, as yet. He went daily down to the bazaar alone; and what he did there, or said, or heard, was no one's business—not even Piggy's.

TOMMY ATKINS has his rights, and no man interferes with them. The bazaar, just then, was officially free from plague, to the soul-singing relief of all officialdom, that had held down—by means of example and argument and sometimes force—exasperated, sanitation-loathing natives for month after threatening month. It was nobody's affair, now that the native quarter was in bounds again, if Farmer Wells and his friend Joe Temple chose to wander together down one street of the bazaar, and disappear within a narrow, gloomy doorway whenever they could spare the time; neither was it any one's affair if Satan Sims chose—as he did choose—to walk at about the same time down a street that was very nearly parallel, and pass in through another door after looking very carefully around him.

And Indian bazaars are such mazy, amazing places that none but a native, or a policeman, or a plague commissioner perhaps, would have guessed that the two doors by which they entered from opposite directions were only two out of twenty exits to one building. There were as many tunneling, twisty passages and doors as rooms to that strange edifice, and there were many more than one room.

But the rooms were not apparently connected. A man in one room—unless he knew the secret, and few did—might easily imagine that his was the one room of the house. He might also imagine himself the only occupant, unless he drove a bayonet through the leather curtains; there would then have been bloody enlightenment—with darkness following probably—and death as certainly as strong lean hands can drive a knife. A hornet's nest is a mild, innocuous affair compared to an Indian assignation house. And a hornet's nest has fewer subdivisions.

There was floor on floor in that house, built crisscross-wise at different heights, and with half floors in between them, and there were other floors—even more stuffy and evil-smelling—deep below the ground level. They were all gloomy, all unconnected so far as a fairly thorough investigation would disclose, and most, if not all of them, were used for quite unholy purposes.

In the large room which Farmer and Joe Temple entered from the Pul-ke-nichi Road, a gambling game of sorts was played. Neither man ever risked more than a few annas on the game, but they seemed to enjoy sitting there hour after hour watching what went on. And nobody minded them for several reasons.

In the first place, they were Englishmen and therefore fools from the native point of view. Then again, they were soldiers and had little money. They would probably keep on coming and looking on until payday. Then, possibly, they would bring all they had and lose it. Then, too, being soldiers they were liable to military discipline, and could not lay an information against the gambling house without incurring punishment themselves for having frequented it; and that led, by natural Oriental sequence, to another and more potent argument.

They might possibly be blackmailed, should occasion call for it. Under stress of argument and threats, and a few rupees perhaps, they might some day prove useful witnesses in court. Plots, for instance, it was argued, and might be argued in a court of law, could never be carried on in a room or in a house frequented habitually by loyal soldiers. So Farmer and Joe Temple went there almost daily and sat hour after hour on a stuffy, blanketed divan, smoked endlessly the native cigarettes provided for them, tossed copper coins occasionally on to the checkered table in the middle of the floor, and no one minded them.

BUT in the room above, which Satan Sims frequented—it was almost directly overhead, though it seemed to be in another street, judging by the winding stairs and corridors that led to it—there was quite another sort of game indulged in. Over the doorway as a general rule—the little square sign-board was removable at discretion—there was the painted legend:

BANDE MATERAM

Though those two words seem innocent and, when taken literally, are innocent (for they mean no more than "Hail Motherland"), they have a deeper, darker meaning that is understood by all the discontented, overeducated, undercouraged scum of the cross-racked Indian underworld.

Digitized by Google

B. A.'s and "failed B. S.'s," babus from Calcutta, Madrassis from the green, fat, fever-country, old, wizened gentlemen in spectacles, and fat young students of alleged economy, nondescripts who had forgotten caste and creed and with them everything except ingrowing hatred of authority, haunted that room and talked there rather more sometimes than mere sedition.

It was a dark room, a regular plot-hatchery, where cowards could congregate in an atmosphere that suited them and helped to hide their lack of courage. It was hung on all six of its crooked walls with dark cloth draperies that deadened sound, and it was lit by hanging lamps that gave only a faint glimmer through their tiny lozenges of colored glass. As a rule a cloud of sandalwood smoke hung in the stagnant air, mixed with the stench of hookahs, and from a teak beam in the middle of the low ceiling there hung a narrow *punkah* that stirred the smell-laden atmosphere into eddies without freshening it.

The cord that moved the *punkah* passed through a small hole in one wall into a tiny cabin of a place where the *punkah wallah* sat, and the squeaking of the purposely frayed cord prevented him from hearing. Inside that room no one was allowed but trusted treason mongers and Satan Sims; not that he was trusted, but for the time being he was considered necessary. He suited their game and they suited his.

They study a lot of history in the Indian universities, as a necessary prelude to political economy. There was not one of those blood-hungry but blood-fearful anarchists who could not quote a mile or two of history to prove that governments depend on armies. They had it all off pat, together with such fragments of their own outworn native philosophy as it suited their purpose to remember. And they mixed up Indian tradition with Napoleonic history and proved, conclusively and very wordily, that England's downfall would eventually come through the corruption of the army.

They talked that subject over at great length when Satan Sims was not among them, and they looked on Sims as a beginning. But he was much too clever to pretend that he had any following, and he and they quite well understood that for the present they had other fish to fry. He was there because he could supply some facts, some advice and certain information, and he came because they promised him hard cash in compensation. They gave him hard cash, too, in little driblets and from time to time, as earnest of good faith.

For the rest, Sims loved to plot for the sake of plotting; to dig into the reeking darkness because he hated light; to listen to the whispering of would-be murderers, because he was a brainy, ambitious, underhanded brute. And that was just what they were. Only their complexions differed, and experience, and tongue; they were blood brothers underneath the skin.

THERE came a day when Sims brought a package to them, done up in a little cardboard box and wrapped in a piece of cloth. On that day he looked very carefully about him before he entered, and walked three times past the door and back again. Even then he seemed doubtful that he was not watched, and kicked a bazaar sweeper and ordered him away before slipping hurriedly into the gloomy doorway.

He argued very long with them on that occasion, explaining certain matters in great detail with the aid of a bespectacled interpreter. He lost patience with them once or twice, and cursed them heartily in all the Hindustanee that he knew. But before he left, a paper roll containing rupees weighed heavily inside his trouser pocket; and after that they cursed him, much more utterly, in a language—or half a dozen of them—that he did not understand.

He refused to leave the room by the way that he had entered it. They argued with him; they even threatened him. But in return he threatened them. And he made it so evident that he was too afraid to be either coaxed or bullied into reason that they gave in finally, and led him through many winding, dark passages, and through trap doors, and under hidden stairways to another exit on the Pul-ke-nichi Road.

As Sims emerged, two men drew back into a corner of the stair above and waited while he passed into the street.

"What's that swine Sims been doing in there, I wonder?" thought Farmer Wells aloud.

"He hasn't Piggy with him, anyhow," said Temple.

"So it seems. But unless that little man has lost all the brains he used to have, he'll be able to tell us what Satan's game is."

Digitized by Google

"Able to, yes. But what if he's still sulking?"

"He isn't sulking any more," said Farmer. "I know the signs. He's back to his beer again—I saw him yesterday."

CHAPTER III

SATAN SIMS GETS A THRASHING

THERE was a place about two miles from barracks, and about two hundred paces from the military road, where illicit cock-fights, and sometimes dog-fights, were pulled off. It was nothing but a gravel pit, dug out when the road was building, but it served its undestined purpose admirably, and it was a place that Farmer and Joe Temple loved to visit because of its associations. They could sit there and discuss vital problems unheard and undisturbed.

They arrived there in the nick of time one afternoon, elbow to elbow as they always were. The moment they came near enough for Farmer to see down into the pit he broke away from Temple and sprang and slid and scurried to the bottom with a little avalanche of gravel following him. But not even that noise, nor the rattle of Temple's following, stopped the session down below. There were two white tunics tossed down in the middle of the walled arena; and in the far corner of it, where the side ran steep and sheer, Satan Sims was battling with all that was left in him to save himself from a knock-out blow.

Piggy Wimpole, head well forward, and scarcely troubling to guard, was boring in and reaching for Sim's body, finding his mark at every second punch. He landed, when he did land, with a thud that sounded like a crowbar going home into soft earth. Piggy's face was bleeding freely, and Sims's was not. But Sims was white-lipped, and giving no more ground because there was no more. Each lunge now, each vicious pile driver that Piggy landed, sent him with a lurch against the crumbling wall behind.

Sims glanced wildly, desperately, at the newcomers—and Piggy landed on his chin, but barely hard enough. Sims tottered at the knees and recovered, and Piggy stepped in to follow up.

"That'll be about the end of it!" said Farmer quietly.

But, seeing enemies instead of friends, and realizing the utter uselessness and worse of further effort with his fists, Sims ducked suddenly and Piggy missed.

"Stand back!" roared Farmer.

He grabbed Piggy by the shoulder and swung him back at least six paces. Sims was on one knee. There are decencies to be observed, decencies, and rules — not Queensberry rules exactly, but even stricter ones—that apply when the army settles personal affairs of honor.

"Give Sims a knee!" said Farmer.

Temple went around behind Sims and did as he was told. He even went to the length of fastening his bootlace for him, that had come undone and might have tripped him.

"Time!" said Farmer, getting out of Piggy's way.

Piggy had scorned a knee; he had spent his minute in getting the blood out of his eyes, and he rushed in now with the evident intention of trying for a knock-out straight away. But Sims had had enough of it, and had too many brains or else too little courage to see matters to a finish. He rose from Temple's knee, tottered once in a well-feigned show of weakness, fell to the ground and stopped there. Farmer pulled Piggy back again.

"Have you had enough, Sims?" he asked.

SIMS did not answer, so Farmer began to count. He counted ten. Then Temple stepped in and dragged Sims to his feet and propped him up against the side of the bank, while Farmer looked Piggy over carefully.

"He's made a worse mess o' your face than I'd ha' believed," he said critically.

"You go an' pull 'is shirt off an' 'ave a look what I done to 'is stomick," spluttered Piggy through bleeding lips.

But Farmer showed no interest in that suggestion.

"Come here a minute, Joe," he said, noticing that Sims was recovering and could already stand alone.

"When that brute's pulled himself together, see him back to barracks, will you? And say! One minute. If he seems to need advice, give him some. Advise him to hold his ugly tongue."

Sims overheard. Farmer had not meant him to, but he had not realized how far Sims had recovered and he had spoken louder than he meant.

Digitized by Google

"All right!" said Sims. "I'll take an elbow back. But no wipe-out, mind! You're three to one—him and two friends of his—and I'll get even with all three of you. You needn't fear I'll split. I'll hold my tongue, but I'll make you three rue the day you were ever born. I'm ready."

He took Joe Temple's arm up the sloping bank at the far end, and set out with him stride for stride toward the barracks.

"How did it start?" asked Farmer, beginning to attend to Piggy's eye after a fashion that is time-honored, but unpleasant to behold or read about.

"The dirty, low-down, sneakin' 'ound!" said Piggy, and then he winced and stepped backward.

"Better lie down, little man," said Farmer. "It's got to hurt you, and you can't flinch with your head against the ground. So—that's better."

After five minutes, more or less, of quite excruciating agony that he endured at Farmer's hands without a grunt, Piggy sat up again, fingering his lip.

"Don't do that," commanded Farmer. "Let it alone. And hold the smooth side o' that stone against your eye. That's the idea. Now, how did it begin?"

"YOU 'eard about them two fulminite percussion fuses disappearin' from the artillery stores?" asked Piggy ln lowered tones.

Farmer nodded.

"Well! What d'yer suppose? That blighter, that perishin' 'ound, says to me, 'e says—'e knowed 'ow me an' you 'ad 'ad a difference—'e says: 'Hi know where one o' them fuses is. Where t'other one's gone I've no idea,' 'e says, 'but I know the bloke that's taken one and 'idden it. Let's get that one,' says 'e, 'an' plant it on that pig Farmer Wells, an' then give 'im away, an' see 'im sent off to the Andamans for a good long trip!'

"So I ups an' 'its 'im one—one good 'un, straight in the jaw. We was right in 'ere when 'e said it, an' o' course when I 'it 'im, 'e couldn't 'elp but peel. What d'yer think o' that for a blighter?"

"It's good news," said Farmer quietly. "Bloomin' good news."

"How d'yer mean?"

"Why, it proves up what I knew already. Didn't know where the other one had gone, didn't he? Huh! Piggy, my son, I'll be a full-blown corporal within six months!"

They set off together back to barracks. On the way Farmer told Piggy certain bits of news that made him squeal with joy, and grin in spite of his brutally doctored lip.

It was hot enough in all conscience, even at Poona, for in India a "cool place" is cool only by comparison. But Farmer Wells began to take a most astounding interest in football. There were six days yet before the Viceroy was due to come, and there was a sort of pause in Poona—a lull before the great event; and since the regiment had little else to do the men turned out in dozens to watch him practise with Joe Temple.

Occasionally the officers came, too. They scented the beginning of a regimental reawakening and did their utmost to encourage it, applauding Farmer, even when they wondered at his method.

It was Rugby football that that regiment played, almost exclusively, and Farmer's place was three-quarter back on the regimental team. So there was nothing that was not exemplary in passing practise, except perhaps the details of it. Farmer seemed to be striving, rather vainly at first, for some new idea.

Temple would throw him the elongated ball from every conceivable angle in turn, and Farmer would catch the thing and run. That much was usual, of course, and quite conservative. But he seemed interested in a brand new way of catching it. At first his efforts were very clumsy, and he dropped the ball at every other try; but after a while, as he grew more and more proficient, he learned to catch it exactly by the middle and hold it away from him instead of hugging it toward him. He seemed awfully interested in keeping the bottom of the ball away from him and from contact with his hand; and every time that he touched the bottom, Temple would shake his head and look extremely doubtful.

So would Piggy Wimpole. Piggy was confined within cantonment limits until the bruises on his face had healed. There had been two stout witnesses, of course—Farmer Wells and Joe Temple, both reputable men—to prove his lie about falling down a pit, so he had got off without punishment. But as time hung heavy, he came each day to the football ground to watch, and

Digitized by Google

brought Farmer's girl, Fanny Riley, with him for lack of more strenuous amusement. Piggy would squeal sometimes when Farmer dropped the ball, but the girl seemed bored and discontented with the whole proceeding.

AS FARMER grew slowly more proficient, Temple would make the ball spin over and over in the air, until at last Farmer could catch it by the middle as it flew, even when it was turning like a spinning wheel.

"That's better, now," said Piggy to the girl beside him. "See what a bloke can learn to do by trying!"

"What's the good of it?" she asked. "I wish he'd try as hard to get promoted as he tries to catch that stupid ball."

"When this 'ere dove o' peace is flutterin' on the wing," said Piggy, "promotion don't come so easy for the soldier man. You watch Farmer, though. 'E's a deep 'un, 'e is. Sometimes that there dove gets 'is wing broke on 'im, and then—sometimes the perishin' fowl lays a egg. There's no knowin'."

"I wish you wouldn't talk in riddles," she said petulantly.

"Just like a woman," said Piggy the philosopher. "Not being nothin' but a bloomin' riddle, there ain't a gal what don't 'ate to listen to anything 'xcep' what's plain as daylight! Ask Farmer. Maybe 'e'll tell you."

She cross-examined Farmer, but with no more satisfying result, although Farmer was distinctly more polite. So, after a dozen futile questions, woman-like she changed her ground and tried to rattle him.

"Why don't you try for a stripe on your sleeve, instead of wasting time like this?" she asked him. "When d'you suppose we're ever going to get married?"

"I'm trying hard enough," said Farmer.

"How d'you suppose I'll like seeing you on Thursday, when the Viceroy comes, standing in line with all the others instead of in the supernumerary ranks behind, where you ought to be?" she asked.

"Don't worry," said Farmer. "You won't see it."

"Why?"

"Because I won't be there."

"Why not?"

"I've leave of absence that day."

"And is that the way to win promotion? By putting in for leave the first day there's a really big parade and every man is wanted to make a showing?"

"It's a Thursday afternoon parade," said Farmer. "That's excuse enough. Parading on a Thursday afternoon is well enough for rookies and the like, but not for men like me and Joe there. The Colonel made no bones about it."

"What are you going to do, then?"

"Watch the parade," said Farmer.

That sounded more hopeful, at least from one point of view. She, too, meant to watch it, and standing in a crowd with a more-than-six-foot man beside her was a better prospect to look forward to than doing the same thing alone.

"Will you call and fetch me, then?" she asked him.

"No," said Farmer, "I will not."

And not another word could she get out of him, question and cross-question how she might. They were hardly on speaking terms when they parted company, and she was almost on the verge of tears, for when he chose to be, Farmer was a well that swallowed everything and gave nothing out, and he was much too busy then to argue with a woman. He had the gambling room down in the bazaar to visit, and his practise with the ball to keep up, and all his regimental duties, in addition to the task of schooling Piggy Wimpole.

"NOW, you understand, Piggy?" he said for the dozenth time, on the morning when the Viceroy was due. "Contrive to be left-hand end man of the company, rear rank. Company A 'll be nearest to the door. They're certain to lead off; our's 'll come next. That'll bring you straight opposite the corner of the building, where I want you. The minute you feel me shove, give, and shove the man in front of you. I'll be standing just behind you in the crowd."

Then he went down to the Durbar Hall, where the Viceroy would hold a big reception almost directly after his arrival. He excited little comment, for a man in uniform most likely has his orders when he makes himself officious on the morning of a parade such as that was going to be. Ten regiments and the guns do not line up without preliminary pacing out. So no one interfered with him, and for the sixth time in a week, but to make assurance six times

Digitized by Google

over sure, he measured out some distances that were already burned deep in his memory. Then he stood aside and waited for the crowd to come and gather.

CHAPTER IV

FARMER WELLS ACTS "AH—ON THE SPUR OF THE MOMENT"

THERE followed in due sequence all the gilded glamor that the crowd adores and the seasoned soldier hates. Regiment by regiment, the infantry marched out of barracks, the Nil Desperandums leading, and lined up along the road that faced the Durbar Hall. A company of Farmer's regiment, just as he had prophesied, fronted the building, two sections of them at the far left end facing down the road. The Viceroy would drive between a lane of steel-tipped men—a lane that ended in a *cul-de-sac*, and left no opportunity for crowding in on him.

Farmer waited for a crowd to form behind them. Then he pushed his way gradually and without apparent interest until he stood immediately behind Piggy Wimpole. Piggy stood exactly where Farmer had directed, facing one corner of the building opposite.

Farmer seemed patient and incurious. He looked a little strange, though, the one soldier in all that motley crowd, standing alone behind his own regiment, but unattached to it. Once or twice an officer looked hard at him, but no one ordered him away or interfered.

Fanny Riley, though, watching from a hundred yards away, was something less than calm. She felt slighted, and neglected, and indignant—mutinous in fact. Farmer's chance of getting married seemed to be growing wondrous thin.

But if ever a man cared nothing for his prospects or surroundings, that man would have seemed to be Farmer at that minute. Piggy, left-end rear-rank man of his company, was quivering with ill-suppressed excitement, though he apparently had no more to disturb him than a routine he had gone through more than a hundred times in his career. There was nothing about a long wait in the sun, and a little extra pipeclay, and a Viceroy, to disturb his equanimity or Farmer's. Both men had faced infinitely sterner things unquailing. Yet Piggy seemed as nervous as a schoolgirl, while Farmer looked as patient and indifferent as a commissariat bullock.

During the two-hour stand in the blazing sun that followed, while the gorgeously hued crowd pressed tightly around on every side of him and almost forced him through the ranks in front, Farmer glanced once or twice behind him—but only once or twice, and with no display of curiosity. It would have been noticeable, though, had anybody watched him closely, that on each occasion he caught Joe Temple's eye and exchanged a scarcely detectable signal with him. Temple was standing well back behind the crowd, and appeared to be rather more wide-awake than Farmer.

But Temple seemed indifferent too. He moved about a little now and then, and once or twice peered in and out among the crowd; but he took no more interest than Farmer did in the endless string of carriages that came along between the lines of soldiers. There was plenty there to keep the crowd enthralled, but nothing that appealed to these two men apparently.

Hired victoria-*gharries* came in jingling lines, packed full with stomach-proud and gorgeously appareled native merchants. Now and then a Maharajah, jeweled and surrounded by his saber-jangling escort, dashed up at a swinging canter, was saluted by the troops, and stepped out from his carriage to the private entrance. Dog-cart followed dog-cart—the smartest and most extravagantly horsed, owned of course by debt-ridden junior officers in uniform, and the shabbier, less pretentious ones, owned, occupied and driven by civilians in the higher grades with somewhat higher theories on dignity.

THE usual farce was gone through that interests the crowd so much more than the uniforms and noise. The civilians, men of real authority, and—some of them—with power of life and death, were forced as usual to wear black frock coats for the sake of tradition and courtesy and Empire. But they wore straw hats or Panamas or helmets for their comfort.

As each carriage reached a spot a hundred yards or so before the door, the horses were reined in for a moment and tall silk hats came out from underneath the seats to the "Ah-h-h-h!" and "Oh-h-h-h!" of an admiring crowd. There is nothing

Digitized by Google

—nothing in the world—that commands such instant recognition from an Eastern crowd as the tall black hat of sahibdom.

Then, far in the distance, trumpets pealed and bugles blared out down the waiting ranks. There was a rustle and the sound of slightly shifting feet. The crowd grew silent as the dead. The booming of cannon, regularly punctuated, bade Asia hold its breath. The Viceroy was coming!

Scarlet coats and brilliant turbans flashed into momentary view along the road, to disappear again at a bend. Then, superbly mounted, looking as if born on horseback, black-bearded and brilliant and proud, the Viceroy's advance guard clattered into view, their polished sabers scarcely more resplendent than their long, black, thigh-deep military boots. Each brown-eyed, six-foot centaur looked like a prince's son. The crowd gasped and thrilled. But Farmer, beyond pushing back a little to prevent the crowd from forcing him between the rear rank of the regiment, took not the slightest notice.

Then came the Viceroy himself, behind six horses, pale-faced and insignificant beside his giant escort, but dignified, if by nothing more than contrast, in sober, well-groomed black. The crowd buzzed with excitement and began to cheer.

"Shoulder—arms!"

There came the sudden, perfectly timed smack of a thousand rifles leaping from the ground.

"Vice-regal salute! Present—arms!"

Farmer turned his back. He still seemed, judging by his attitude, a trifle bored. But now his blue-gray eyes were searching keenly through the crowd, and—just as the Viceroy's equipage came to a spark-throwing halt—he caught another signal from Joe Temple. Temple's hand waved this time, and he pointed.

THEN Farmer came to life. He awoke with the suddenness of a volcano, and with as much unexpectedly directed energy. Down went his shoulder, and he turned as if he were about to charge through an opposing football line. All the strength and weight of his six-feet-two of bone and muscle concentrated now in one prodigious, calculated shove. And Piggy Wimpole, standing rigidly at the "Present," received the whole of it just above the waist.

Piggy, rifle, fixed bayonet and all, went crashing headlong straight into the man in front of him, and both men tumbled in the dust. And through the gap thus made, leaping over them, but looking behind him over his left shoulder, burst Farmer Wells!

There was instant consternation and something that was more. In that country, where the conquering race exists in an atmosphere of plots and ever simmering sedition, men act promptly. Sabers flashed and a clattering eddy whirled within the escort. The Viceroy, who had risen, resumed his seat. All eyes were on Farmer Wells, and a rush was made to intercept him. But his eyes were staring upward and behind him, and he ran swiftly as he could toward the Viceroy, with arms outstretched.

The crowd watched, spellbound. So did the still-presenting troops. Then, within half a second of the first amazement, the escort reined in and drew back again; their eyes had followed Farmer's, and they saw what he saw, and understood. The crowd, too, understood, but stood transfixed.

Big, and dark, and egg-shaped, spinning over and over through the air, but coming slowly in an ellipse-like movement, came an iron sphere, thrown high from somewhere in the crowd, aimed short, but headed straight toward the Viceroy.

Farmer, arms still outstretched, ran underneath it. A young officer made a grab for him, but Farmer shook him off. The Viceroy sat stock still, no paler than usual, but rather rigid, and Farmer came to a standstill with his legs apart and his knees a little bent, about six feet from the carriage.

For a tenth of a second that seemed a week he waited still in that position, watched by at least ten thousand eyes, and surrounded by the tense, awful silence that precedes an execution. The sphere spun around above him, seemed to pause in mid-air, turned slowly, thick-end downward, fell —and Farmer caught it!

He caught it exactly by the middle, with his arms held well away from him. But it seemed to be too heavy for him, for it slipped. He squeezed it with all his might; his teeth were set, and his breath came between them with a hissing sound. Every muscle that he had in his enormous frame seemed strained in the one effort. But the thing turned slowly between his hands and slipped still further, until he held it only by the narrow end.

Digitized by Google

THEN he let go of it. Even the soldiers—still standing at the "Present," for they had had no other order—gasped in unison. But he caught it again nimbly by the middle before it touched the ground, and turned it thick end upward, and held it out from him.

"Out o' the way!" he yelled then.

Down went his head again, as if he were running on the football field, and he charged straight for the thinnest portion of the crowd. The ranks of fixed bayonets opened out in front of him, and the crowd behind melted as smoke disperses before a sudden wind.

There were yells now, and where every living thing had stood transfixed there was rushing, whirling, eddying movement. Farmer cut a trail in front of him, and left a swath behind like that which a wild boar makes through jungle grass—straight for where Joe Temple stood.

"There's the water!" growled Joe, pushing him.

There was a bucket, placed in providential readiness behind a tree. It was a native bucket, such as the water sellers sometimes use, and its presence there would need no explanation, for an Indian crowd buys water as a Coney Island crowd buys peanuts, or a Hamstead Heath crowd oranges. Farmer stooped above the bucket and lowered his egg-shaped burden into it gingerly, thick end upward. Then he drew out a handkerchief and wiped his face.

"It was a near thing, that!" he grinned.

"Near thing!" said Joe. "Man alive! If ever I had a dose of diddering palsy it was then, when you all but dropped the thing."

"There was grease on it," answered Farmer. "Who'd ha' thought o' that?"

"Look out!" said Joe. " 'Tshun! Right about! They're coming!"

"They" came at a run—the Colonel and the Adjutant of the Nil Desperandums with twenty men behind them, an officer of the Viceroy's bodyguard, a magistrate, several civilian officers, and a police officer and ten men. The policemen dispersed in the direction of the crowd at once, to look for suspects, with as much hope of finding them as codfish have of winning to Nirvana; men who throw bombs in India do it and vanish. Their plans are well laid in advance, and the pestilential underworld that breeds them swallows them.

Farmer saluted.

"I'd keep away, sir!" he advised.

But the Colonel stooped above the bucket and examined what was in it.

"It's a percussion bomb," he said, after a moment's examination, "with a military detonator fitted. Black powder and screws and nails in all likelihood—usual sort of thing. Wasn't water-tight—that's a good job—see? There's a hole here where the two halves are joined; the water's got in and put the powder out of commission."

The Colonel heaved a sigh of relief, turned and looked hard at Farmer Wells for nearly half a minute.

"Had you any warning of this?" he asked.

"No, sir!" lied Farmer Wells.

"Then how did you come to see it in time?"

"Private Temple here saw it first, sir. He was standing at the back of the crowd, and signaled me."

"Very neat indeed!" said the Colonel. "Very prompt, and—ah—very creditable. Men who see things, and who act promptly on the spur of the moment—ah—make good non-commissioned officers. Ah—let me see—you'd better fall in behind the regiment, both of you. His Excellency might care to speak to you when the Durbar is over."

True to the traditions of the Anglo-Indian Government, the Viceroy had gone on into the Durbar Hall as if nothing unforeseen had happened. The long, thin, double line of glittering steel had formed again outside; the escort sat their horses stolid and undisturbed; and inside the hall not a man of all the gorgeous crowd assembled there had any notion that death had hovered near the hall and gone away again unsatisfied.

CHAPTER V

"TWO BLOOMIN' DUKE O' WELLINGTONS"—AND PIGGY

UNDER the age-old mango tree beyond the cricket ground the three friends sat in conference again, but this time with a difference. Farmer Wells and Joe Temple each had a stripe upon his sleeve. Piggy Wimpole sat in front of them, with both his feet tucked under him, and that foul-smelling small clay pipe of his acting as a pointer to his arguments as usual.

"Hi don't see why," he said. "You an' Joe did the 'ole kyboosh between you. I

Digitized by Google

did nothin'. 'F the Viceroy—an' 'e's a good sport, mind yer—gives you two a thousand dibs apiece, it ain't an anna more than either of you earned. You keep it. Why share it up with me?"

"Because of Sims," said Farmer.

"Why, what the dooce 'as that swine got to do with it?"

"This, little man. Sims sold the detonator to the black men. I found that much out from you. But for that, I might have told the Colonel all about it—how Joe here overheard the plotting and understood every word they said, and all that.

"That would have meant an investigation of that joint down in the bazaar, and that would have dragged Sims in. And who wants any one to know that there's one man in a decent regiment black swine enough to mix up in a thing like that? Here's another reason. If you hadn't been ready, and hadn't given way, I'd never have got through the ranks in time."

"Rot!" said Piggy. "You go an' tell that to the 'orse marines. Why, you great lumberin' 'ippopotamus, you'd ha' bunted clear through a stone wall with the shove you give me. All right, though; seein' I'm the only thing as ever 'appened, fork out! 'And it over. Gimme the lot if you want to."

A wad of bills and a little silver changed hands, and Piggy stroked his pocket gleefully.

"I s'pose you two bloomin' Duke o' Wellin'tons are both goin' to get married now?" he asked with a leer.

"Not me, for one!" said Temple. "I'm going on for more promotion, though."

"So am I," said Farmer. "The sergeants' married quarters look pretty good to me! But, has this little combination got to be broken up? As we are—us lance-corporals, and you a private, Piggy—we're not supposed to be much more than on speaking terms!"

"Oh, my aunt!" said Piggy. "'Ave I got to be'ave myself an' sweat for promotion, too?"

"It looks to me," said Farmer quietly, "as though we've two things left to do. Does Satan Sims get off scot free? Not if I know it!"

"Let's kill 'im," said Piggy.

"Let's hear the plan," said Temple, pulling out his pipe.

"Let's make that blackguard wipe his own slate clean," said Farmer. "I vote we take our time, and watch our chance, and give him his choice, when the time comes, of death or a clean slate."

"Done!" said Piggy and Joe Temple in one voice.

"What's the other thing?" asked Piggy.

"Regimental Orders — 'Private E. H. Wimpole to be lance'—soon as possible!"

"Oh, my aunt!" said Piggy. "Well, if I must, I must!"

Dinner In Jungleland

THE only formal meal among the Akikuyu is that partaken of at sundown. It is eaten usually outside the hut, but inside the enclosure of the homestead. The morning meal is made from the leavings of supper. Men and women never eat together. A woman is not allowed to see a man eat meat, still less does she cook it for him. No knife, spoon or fork is employed with any dish. If a piece of meat wants dividing, it is chopped in half with a touch of a sword-point. The principal diner hands to each his portion in order of precedence. No one exhibits any eagerness to begin, nor hurries with it, nor asks for a further helping. It is the rule to eat slowly, and the first mouthful is always spat out on the ground.

CAPT. W. ROBERT FORAN.

Digitized by Google

The TEN-CENT HEAD

By Octavus Roy Cohen

Author of "The Fight," "The In-Curve," etc.

"HARD luck," proclaimed Manager Con O'Leary of the Marines to the roomful of ball players, "comes in bunches.

"A team will run along fine as you please for a stretch and then, just when you've got the home crowd comin' your way and the local rooters backin' you to a standstill along comes your 'jinx' and says 'hullo.'

"So far we've got along pretty good, and just when I'm pattin' myself on the back and thankin' the good Lord for his mercies, Jerry Rohan gets a charley-horse and Rudy Beiger slips a cog in his knee-cap combination. An' here we are within smellin' distance of the top, an' with the pennant only three weeks away—an' our two best pitchers laid up until the time for the world's series anyway—with the chances that they'll never get any o' *that* money."

"Maybe——" hazarded Jimmy Conifer, but O'Leary had his talking-cap on, and he silenced the young second-sacker with a look.

"As I was saying before I was interrupted," he went on with vitriolic sarcasm, "trouble comes in coveys. I ask you now what chancst have I got with Pat Stevens and Fritz Harrington the only vets left on my twirlin' staff—an' look at this club standing—look at it!"

He waved the sport sheet of the *Evening News* in their faces, and they glanced at the little box of statistics:

	W	L	Pct.
Highlanders	90	58	.608
Marines	88	59	.599
Oaks	85	59	.590
Millionaires	71	68	.511
Millers	72	72	.500
Indians	68	76	.472
Panthers	59	86	.407
Grays	46	101	.313

"Baseball is on th' hog," snapped the manager viciously, "an' th' Marines are now about to get a dose of the same stuff that has been handed the Millionaires and th' Panthers. An' lookit th' time it's coming. We've played off all postponed games with the tailenders and ain't got nothin' left but games with the leaders—and our two best pitchers—" His voice droned off into a wail. "It ain't fair——"

Principally because there was nothing to be said, the other players said nothing. In truth, the Marines were in a bad way. Ever since mid-season, when three accidents had forced them to relinquish first place to the steady-going Millionaires, and later see the Highlanders pass them, the team had been battling against adverse fortune.

The Millionaires' spurt had come to an abrupt end and the team had tobogganed in a sickening manner. But the Highlanders, by all odds the most evenly balanced team in the circuit, continued at the top of the heap, apparently oblivious to the fighting Marines close on their heels.

Accident after accident had occurred,

Digitized by Google

and O'Leary, with the aggressive, bulldog tactics which had made him famous as a manager wherever baseball was known, rallied his men and transformed them into playing demons.

There was little mechanical coherence in the Marine organization, but there was a world of O'Leary spirit. They hit at everything which looked hitable, they ran bases like fiends and took bewildering chances.

But all of that spirit can not overcome what ball players fondly call a jinx. And one and all they agreed that the Marines were jinxed. Through it all O'Leary had smiled gamely, and slowly and surely the team had crept up on the Highlanders until now they stood only a game and a half from the league leadership. And their two best pitchers were out of the game.

"An' the worst of it is," moaned O'Leary, "that I've been sloshin' money around like water, and the other teams are in a conspiracy against me. I can't even buy a ham-ander when I offer a fortune. I've got three scouts on the road yelpin' for help, an' nothin' doing. Stevens and Harrington are game, I know, but they ain't no supermen. An' Dobbs and Carver are green as grass. I wish——"

PITT answered a sharp knock, and took a telegram from the bellhop.

"For you," he announced hopefully, handing it to O'Leary, "I wonder——"

The manager ripped open the flap, and his jaw dropped.

"Look!" he mouthed, holding forth the slip of yellow paper.

Crowding around him, they read:

CON O'LEARY,
Manager Marines, Metropole Hotel.
Can get you a ten-thousand-dollar arm and a ten-cent head for five hundred spot cash. How about it? Wire immediately. HAM.

"Thinks he's funny," growled the manager sourly. "Ham Dixon always did think that he had Jimmy Powers an' Sam Bernard skinned when it come to real live humor. Five hundred spot cash for a ten-cent head!"

"An' a ten-thousand-dollar arm," reminded Young, the giant catcher, gently.

"Who is it?"

"How do I know!" raved O'Leary. "I s'pose th' fool has run across some bush-leaguer who throws a fast one or a 'round-the-corner curve, like they useter do in the old days, an' he thinks he's landed somethin' worth havin'."

"Ham ain't never fell down on the job yet, has he?" inquired Conifer mildly. Dixon had discovered Conifer.

"No. But what chancst have I got with a man you can buy for five hundred at the end of a season? Of course, I'll take a chancst on it. Gimme a blank!"

He wrote furiously for a minute, called a boy and dispatched the following wire:

HAMILTON DIXON,
Tutwiler Hotel,
Birmingham, Alabama.
Draft on club for five hundred. Come with your man. And Lord help you if he's a lemon.
O'LEARY.

In less than three hours came the answer:

Have closed the deal. Lemons are good for lemonade anyway. His name is Buck.

"Piffle!" snorted O'Leary. "Who wants lemonade. More o' Ham's cheap wit."

The next morning Ham Dixon arrived and ushered his find into the room.

"Mister Tommy Buck," he introduced him.

Buck didn't resemble Christy Mathewson, save that he was utterly different. He was thin to skinniness, tall, angular, bony, scrawny, freckle-skinned, clumsy, big-footed, awed-looking and he had a bullet head. O'Leary with difficulty repressed a groan as he shook hands with the newcomer. Then he turned Buck over to the tender mercies of the other members of the team, who happened to be in the room, and cornered Dixon.

"Now you lop-sided sun-of-a-gun!" he muttered wrathfully. "What's this joker you dealt me? Who ever said that mutt could play ball?"

"Me."

"Bughouse! I don't believe he knows first base from the right-field bleachers. Ten-cent head! I'll bet he has—an' I see where I stand to lose $499.90 on the deal."

"Go easy," said Dixon softly, "and lemme put you wise. Buck's been pitchin' on the Birmingham club on the Southern Association for less'n a month. They bought him for a song from the Charleston Sally leaguers.

"He sprouted in a cotton-mill somewheres along o' the Joe Jackson district. And I seen him work. He's got the most speed I

Digitized by Google

ever seen, an' a fast one that breaks like a lesson in geometry. Ain't got no slow ball, but he don't need 'em. His jump ball—honest it'll set you crazy."

"Like it did you, huh?" sarcastically.

"Yep," was the cheerful retort, "like it done me."

"What'd they sell him for five hundred for if he's all this? They could have got more for him if he's such a Rusie."

"The ten-cent head!" whispered Ham.

"Go on!" rasped O'Leary. "Spill the worst!"

"He gets rattled awful easy. S'long as he's goin' good he's a dream—a perfect wonder. But when the stands start to root he's all in. No head at all. He'll feed up balls faster'n any man I ever saw. One day I seen him walk five of the New Orle'ns team in succession——"

"An' then you pays five hundred cartwheels for 'im, eh? Swell judgment."

"Aw! back up, Con! The reason they rooted him into battyland in New Orleans is that the circuit is close to the South Atlantic league where they had his number, and they found out that screeching would get his goat. But before they found it out, he pitched one no-hit game and three one-hit games. Y'see the fans up here don't know nothing about this faculty of his'n, and almost all o' your remaining games are scheduled on the home grounds. An' if you don't rattle this bird, he's some humdinger."

"You don't mean to tell me, Ham," asked O'Leary earnestly, "that you think I'd be safe in putting him in the box tomorrow against the Millers?"

"I sure do," retorted Dixon. "You take my tip an' try it before that dope on him simmers North."

IN DESPERATION O'Leary tried his new pitcher the next day. At first Buck seemed a little awed at the size of the grounds and the immensity of the crowd which had turned out, but he won handily, allowing but four hits, and two of them scratches, during the nine innings of play.

That night he was a hero. Whatever jealousies there may be on a baseball team that is dragging along in the cellar, there is a wonderful fraternal feeling among the members of a team which is scrapping for first place, and one and all they gave him the glad-hand and praised him to the skies for his wonderful showing.

Four days later he twirled against the Grays and shut them out with three hits. Two days after that he repeated the performance. O'Leary was wild with delight.

And then came the Highlanders for the series which was to decide the possession of first place for the final pennant sprint.

Pat Stevens twirled against them the first day and was beaten out in the eleventh inning before a crowd which totaled 30,000. The next day Fritz Harrington turned the tables and won a two-to-one victory.

That night, in three of the evening papers were printed clippings from various Southern dailies calling attention to the fact that Tommy Buck has been known in the South Atlantic and Southern leagues as the man with the ten-cent head.

"It's all off," groaned O'Leary, when he read the various accounts of Buck's yellow streak. "It's all off."

Next morning Buck asked if he was to twirl that afternoon and O'Leary answered a snarling, "No!"

"Why?" inquired the recruit amiably.

"Did'ja read that bunk in the papers?"

"Yes."

"Is it true that you gave away so many games down there in the bushes?"

"I guess so."

"Then how in thunder have yuh got th' nerve to come to me an ast if you're gonna pitch this afternoon?"

" 'Cause I've got over it," averred Buck. Honest——"

O'Leary sized him up critically.

"Let's hope so. I'm gonna start Carver. You keep warmed up. I might take a chancst on you to start with, but them Highlanders have got about two thousand rooters over here with two brass bands."

THE huge park was jammed to capacity with a hilarious, excited crowd when the lineups were posted on the score-board as follows:

MARINES	HIGHLANDERS
O'Leary, l.f.	Craig, r.f.
Pitt, 3b.	Barringer, 3b.
Collins, r.f.	Houston, c.f.
Shirley, c.f.	Trenholm, s.s.
Werner, s. s.	Conard, 1b.
Bell, 1b.	Owens, l.f.
Conifer, 2b.	Klaussen, 2b.
Lincoln, c.	Kepner, c.
Carver, p.	Hutchins, p.

Digitized by Google

The Highlanders went to the bat, and Craig, the first man up, promptly poled out a single. Barringer sacrificed him to second with a pretty little bunt down the first-base line, and he romped over the pan when Houston doubled to right. Trenholm fanned, but Conard singled and Houston tallied. Owens walked, amidst a deafening din from the stands of the Highlander rooters, and Klaussen mercifully ended the agony by lining out to O'Leary.

With the score two to nothing against them in the first inning, there was gloom on the Marine bench. Two or three men there were who made game efforts to cheer up the downcast Carver. As he selected his heavy bat, O'Leary motioned Pat Stevens to his side.

"Sore arm or not," he growled, "get that whip of yours warmed up, and tell that ten-cent-header of ours to do likewise. Swell chancst he'd stand with this noise."

Then O'Leary popped out to the third baseman. Pitt walked and was nabbed trying to steal. Collins grounded out to short, and the inning was over.

In the second a combination of a hit, an error and a stolen base gave the Highlanders another run; but in their half of the third —the Highlanders having been held scoreless in that session, as were the Marines in the previous inning—the Marines shoved two over the platter, and the score-board showed:

Highlanders	210
Marines	002

The fourth session passed uneventfully, but in the fifth the fireworks started again when Trenholm walked, went to second on Pitt's error, stole third and scored on Owens' infield out. There was gloom in the Marine stands as the boy posted the big, metal figure, showing the score to the minute as:

Highlanders	210	1
Marines	002	

The game meant first place to the Marines, and O'Leary was desperate. Collins went to the bat for their half of the fifth and O'Leary called Stevens aside.

"Feel able to finish the game?" he asked gruffly. "We've just simply got to win it, and the Highlanders are battin' all Hades outa Carver's delivery. They're eatin' him alive! But we've got our battin' clothes on, an' mebbe——"

"My wing's sore," commented Stevens grimly, "but I'm game to try anything oncet."

Tommy Buck had been listening attentively. As O'Leary turned away he grasped him by the shoulder with those slender, yet wonderfully strong fingers.

"Why can't I go in, Mister O'Leary?" he pleaded.

O'Leary regarded him not unkindly.

"You know as well as I do, Buck. It's because you've got a ten-cent head. How can you expect me to give you a chancst up here in the majors with the crowd wise to your weakness and the leadership hanging in the balance. It's too dadblamed risky, and I ain't no gambler."

"Gimme a chancst," persisted Buck earnestly. "Honest, I think I'm all right now. Them three games I pitched since I been here have changed me. I'm game, honest I am. An' that crowd wouldn't rattle me——"

"No? Say, son, you don't know nothin' about rootin'! That there crowd can make more noise over one pitched ball than the whole Southern league can make over a champeenship race. They'd have your nanny cavortin' around the diamond inside of five minutes after you went in the box. Why d'yuh think they brought them bands out here? 'Cause they thought I was gonna pitch *you* that's why! I——"

Buck's narrow jaw grew firm.

"A'right," he snapped. "I can go in there an' keep that bunch from scorin' any more. I tell you I got my nerve an' I got my ten-thousand-dollar arm. I give you leave to yank me out any time. But if you wanna lose this game, an' tomorrer's an' the day after's—just let Stevens go in yonder an' pitch his arm outa th' socket! That's all I got to say!" And Tommy Buck stalked to the bench in dignified silence.

Con O'Leary stared after him wonderingly. Collins had fanned and the situation was getting more desperate with the passing of each minute. He almost decided to take a chance, when Shirley swung futilely at a fast one and the Highlander rooters broke into a bedlam of sound and he saw Tommy Buck start nervously and glance at the stand.

"He talks game," muttered O'Leary, "but it's too much of a chancst to take."

Then Shirley dumped a nasty one down the first-base line and beat the ball to the

Digitized by Google

bag. O'Leary dashed into the coachers box and relieved Rohan. Werner single to left and Shirley took third on the play Bell bunted and Shirley slid safely under Kepner's arm. Then Conifer and Lincoln lined out to the outfield and the inning was over, but "That there score-board looks better," sighed O'Leary. And in truth it did, with the figures strung up.

HIGHLANDERS	210	1
MARINES	002	1

STEVENS hit the first batter and walked the second, but he was one of the seasoned veterans of the team and he worked the others to perfection, finally winding up the inning by catching Klaussen napping off second. O'Leary talked solicitously with him on the bench.

"Mebbe I can last it out," said Stevens grimly. "But that there team has to play ball behind me. I can't win the game alone —my arm is too sore."

Buck heard, grinned, and felt his own steel-strong, and nicely warmed arm.

Stevens drew a base on balls but was forced at second by O'Leary. Pitt was hit by a pitched ball, populating first and second. Collins singled, sending the runners ahead one base each, and Shirley electrified the crowd by slamming the second ball pitched over the left-field fence.

It would be ridiculous to attempt a description of the enthusiasm which rent the crowd. The Marines had gone into the lead and with a vengeance. The game seemed tightly sewed up, and the hold on first place a thing assured. Werner lined out to Barringer and the inning was over, but the crowd howled again as the boy revised the score-board to read:

HIGHLANDERS	210	10
MARINES	002	14

The Highlanders and Marines passed over the sixth without a tally on either side, but with the commencement of the seventh Stevens' arm, sore at best, began to weaken under the terrific strain. Two bases on balls, a hit batter and a wild pitch gave the Highlanders one run. The Marines were blanked in their half, and in the eighth inning the Highlanders added another, the Marines failing to score, so that the board read:

HIGHLANDERS	210	100	11
MARINES	002	140	00

Seven to six the score was, a regular old-fashioned slugfest, with first one team ahead and then the other. The fans recognized that Stevens was weak, and, though the team was giving him good support, many there were who yelled for Buck, the new phenom.

Stevens' face was set when he walked into the box for the ninth inning. Barringer, the first man up, waited insolently and walked on four bad ones. Houston promptly sacrificed him to second. Then Trenholm walked. The first three balls put over for Conard were wide of the platter.

Tommy Buck stood up in front of the players' bench and waved wildly at O'Leary in left field. The fans recognized him and howled their glee—it was a roar of acclaim. The game was stopped temporarily, and then O'Leary made one of those flash decisions which had made him the marvel of the baseball world.

He signaled Buck to relieve Stevens.

He had been driven to it. Now, with Barringer on second, Trenholm on first, one out, three balls and no strikes on the batter, O'Leary was putting in to the box the man who hadn't held on in the Southern because he was empty-headed and was rattled too easily. And he did it because Buck was his only hope, not because he expected Buck to make good.

"Ten-cent head!" he groaned. "Any man who could get the team outa *this* hole needs a million-dollar head."

BUCK strode nervously into the box. The Marine fans howled their greetings and he grinned his ugly grin and bobbed his cap in answer. Then the Highlander contingent awakened and the blatant blare of their tuneless bands was fierce enough to have rattled a deaf-mute. Seemingly Buck did not hear.

His first one cut the heart of the pan with a speed fairly bewildering. It was the first time that the Highlanders had been up against the new Marine, and Buck's speed was something new to them. They gasped as Conard swung too late.

Then he wound up, shot the ball, and it went wide of the platter.

"Ba-a-ll four!" sang the umpire. "Take yuh base!"

Conard trotted laughingly to first, filling the bases. There was one man down, the bases were filled, and it appeared that

Digitized by Google

already the fearsome noise in the stands—which the home bugs with misdirected intentions were seeking to drown—was unbearable.

"They got us!" groaned O'Leary. "That ten-cent head——"

Buck stood in the center of the diamond holding the ball in his hands. The runners were taking discreet leads off their bases. The noise was deafening.

Buck shot the ball like a bullet into the hands of Tinkle Bell, the giant first baseman. Bell, knowing Buck's weakness, strolled on to the diamond with the ball, and for several seconds they stood shoulder to shoulder in intimate conversation. As they parted and took up their respective positions, Bell nodded his head—O'Leary saw.

"Bell knows he's hopeless!" he moaned. "Wotinell can a poor manager do?"

Owens grinned at Buck.

"Dare you to put one over," he taunted, his voice coming but faintly to the ears of the ungainly pitcher, so loud was the din.

No answering smile decorated Buck's face. The ball went like a bullet—at least six inches wide.

"Ba-al 'un!"

The stands shrieked fiendishly. Again the ball went wide.

"Ball tuh!"

The local contingent awakened and implored O'Leary to take him out of the box. And O'Leary left him in merely because there was nothing else to do.

"If I ever take a chancst again," he muttered, "I hope some one will hit me wit' a brick—a hard brick, too!"

Judging by Buck's actions, he was rattled. He knew that his entire major league career rested on his making good or failing to do so. True, the test was not a just one but . . . .

He sped the ball.

"Ball t'ree!"

Lincoln slammed the ball back to the pitcher disgustedly. In a fury Buck caught it and whirled to face the umpire.

"What you call that?" he grated.

"Ball!"

"Ugh!" His face was contorted with passion. "I can't get a straight deal——"

Then Tommy Buck, he of the ten-thousand-dollar arm and ten-cent head, slammed the ball on the ground! It bounced in the direction of first base.

A wild groan went up from the players and rooters. Of all the kid stunts that had ever been pulled in baseball, this was the worst—deliberately throwing the ball away with the bases filled.

"Run! Run!"

Coachers and fans were screeching it. The base-runners started off like streaks. But what . . . .

Bell swooped in from first, grabbed the ball on the bounce and lined it home! The runner, not knowing that the ball was anywhere near, didn't even try to slide under Lincoln's waiting arm and was an easy out at the plate. Then Lincoln slammed the sphere like a bullet to Pitt and that runner was caught out by a foot. The double-play had been completed. Three men were out. The Marines had won!

BUCK was smiling softly when O'Leary came into the bench. The manager's face was wreathed in smiles, for the game had been saved at the eleventh hour, and by a fluke. Memory of his mental travail came back to him as he set eyes on Buck's gangling form.

"You're fired!" he howled. "Yuh bonehead!"

"Wait a minute, Con," said Bell softly, and the others listened. "You can thank Buck for winnin' th' game. When him and me talked there by the first base-line he told me he was gonna put over three bad ones, then get mad at the umps and roll the ball on the ground between first an' home. I tried to get him not to—but nothin' would do but for him to take a chancst. That's why I was on th' job gettin' th' ball."

O'Leary's jaw had fallen. He was staring in unbelief at Buck.

"All framed up?" he gasped.

"Yep!"

The manager turned his back.

"Will some one please kick me?" he begged seriously. "I thought that guy had a ten-cent head!"

That night as they grinned over the box-score of the game, Jerry Rohan observed sagely:

"It ain't no lie that you never can tell who won the game by just lookin' at the box-score. Now there's some wise guys—the kind that studies Winter dope-sheets—who think that they can, but believe me they're usually dead wrong. Take them goose-eggs after Buck's name for instance:"

Digitized by Google

MARINES

	AB	R	H	PO	A	E
O'Leary, l.f.	6	1	1	2	0	0
Pitt, 3b.	5	1	1	2	4	1
Collins, r.f.	4	0	2	1	0	0
Shirley, c.f.	5	2	3	0	0	0
Werner, s.s.	5	0	0	0	3	0
Bell, 1b.	4	1	0	9	4	1
Conifer, 2b.	4	1	0	3	5	1
Lincoln, c.	4	0	1	8	2	0
Carver, p.	1	0	1	1	1	0
Stevens, p.	1	1	0	1	1	0
Buck, p.	0	0	0	0	0	0
	39	7	9	27	20	3

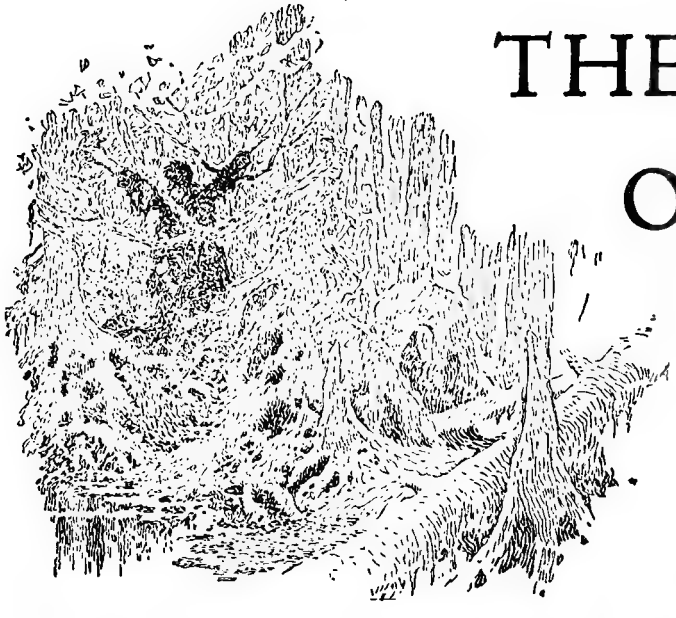
HIGHLANDERS

	AB	R	H	PO	A	E
Craig, r.f.	5	1	1	1	0	0
Barringer, 3b.	4	0	0	4	1	0
Houston, c.f.	5	1	1	1	0	0
Trenholm, s.s.	4	1	0	1	5	1
Conard, 1b.	4	1	2	10	1	0
Owens, l.f.	5	0	0	2	0	1
Klaussen, 2b.	3	1	0	2	2	1
Kepner, c.	4	1	0	3	1	1
Hutchins, p.	4	0	1	0	0	0
	38	6	5	24	10	4

Score by innings:

HIGHLANDERS	210	100	110—6.
MARINES	002	140	00x—7.

SUMMARY:—Home run: Shirley. Two-base hit: Houston. Hit by pitched ball: Pitt, Collins, Carver, Barringer, Klaussen. Stolen bases: O'Leary, Werner, Conifer, Owens. Struck out: by Hutchins, 5; by Carver, 3; by Stevens, 3; by Buck, 0. Bases on balls: off Hutchins, 6; off Carver, 3; off Stevens, 5; off Buck, 1. Double plays: Trenholm to Conard; Bell to Lincoln to Pitt. Wild pitches: Hutchins, 1; Carver, 1; Stevens, 3. Passed ball: Kepner. Time of game: 2:10. Umpire: Barron.



THE LOVE OF MEN

By
Nevil G. Henshaw
Author of "The Black Violin," "A Pair of Mules," etc.

AFTER it had become sadly apparent that we would see no more ducks until the evening *passée*, the little hunchback, Jean Le Bossu, produced the lunch with which he seemed always to be miraculously provided. We ate heartily, for it was our first bite since long before sunrise, and then when the last crum was gone stretched out behind our blinds to enjoy that peace and contentment which comes only with tobacco and a day spent in the open.

"And now for a story, Jean," I suggested when my pipe was going and I had fixed my head so that I could just catch a glimpse of the long, gray line of the Louisiana coast.

The little man thought for a moment as he rolled his pinch of tobacco into a square of brown paper.

"A story, m'sieu?" he asked. "*Bien.* I

Digitized by Google

will tell you one, and I will also answer your question of this morning.

"You remember how, just before a flight, you asked me if in my position as guide I did not run across many strange events and people? Listen now and you will hear of the strangest event, the most curious people, that it has ever been my lot to know."

IT CAME about some years ago, in the early Winter when the birds were at their best. For two weeks I had been with a party out near the edge of the gulf and so, when they returned to Anse Le Vert and I went with them to make sure that their effects departed safely, I was very tired. Yet hardly had I seen them off when fresh work came pulling at my elbow.

This time it was Laperouse, the keeper of the hotel and coffee-house, and he greeted me with a shout of satisfaction.

"Bossu," he cried. "I thought that you would never return. I have looked for you every day."

"Yet you will look longer, you and your guests, Laperouse," said I. "First of all I must have some rest."

But Laperouse was not to be denied.

"Ah no, Bossu," he insisted. "This will be a rest. There are but two of them, and they swear that they will have no one save yourself. Of course it is to my advantage to keep them, but if they stay longer they will drive me mad. Come, Jean. You can not refuse. There will be good money in it also."

And thus he went on until we had reached the coffee-house, and he had dragged me inside.

The two who were so anxious for my services are not hard of description. They were young, they were from the city, and they were of French descent. Both were strong-limbed and muscular, as from a life of care, and in age, in weight, and in height there was little difference between them. Perhaps the one who was called St. Mar was a little the older, since it was he who first addressed me.

"You are Jean Le Bossu," he asked.

"I am he, m'sieu," I replied.

"Good," he returned. "And now, since my friend Prevost and I have already waited for you several days, we need waste no time in haggling. We wish to go upon a hunting expedition, and, through the recommendation of friends, we particularly want you as our guide. We will need your boat, and supplies for a week. Also we wish to start no later than tomorrow morning. Here is my bill-book. After you have arranged for everything, take out what you consider your services worth."

Now this, m'sieu, was a pretty compliment. Tired though I was, I could not help but appreciate it. A moment I stood with the bill-book in my hand, framing my refusal, and as I did so my eye caught a certain strange light in that of M'sieu St. Mar.

Ah, m'sieu, I had seen that light before, though not in the eyes of huntsmen. It was one of anxiety, of impatience, of that nerve-racking suspense when each moment of waiting is a year of torture. Looking quickly at M'sieu Prevost, I surprised the same light in his eyes. It was then that I understood Laperouse's desire to be rid of his restless guests. It was then also that, despite my weariness, I changed my mind.

"So," said I to myself. "Your trouble is easy to read, my friends. One of you has in his pocket an ancient chart of this coast, and upon that chart a cross marks the resting-place of buried treasure. Now I, who all my life have sought unsuccessfully for one of these gifts of M'sieu Lafitte, am still of a mind to try. There, I will go with you."

But aloud I only said:

"*Bien*, m'sieu. It shall be as you wish."

WE LEFT next morning at sunrise and, as we dropped down the bayou to the bay, M'sieu St. Mar came aft to my post at the tiller.

"And which shall it be, m'sieu?" I inquired. "Drake Island for ducks, or the passes for geese? Or will you try both?"

But M'sieu St. Mar shook his head, turning and pointing behind us.

"Neither, Le Bossu," he replied. "We are bound for that great cypress swamp which stretches out to the westward of Anse Le Vert. By coasting around how long will it take you to reach its outer edge?"

"You mean the Pointe Noire, of course," said I. "We can make it by sunset. But surely, m'sieu, you do not intend to hunt there? At this season the marsh is burnt off by deer-hunters, and at best it is deserted. Upon the edge of the swamp there is

Digitized by Google

naught save large game, and you have only your shotguns."

"Just the same we will try it," replied M'sieu St. Mar, and with that he returned to where he had left his companion in the bow.

Thus, m'sieu, I took my course, and as I went I wondered much. As I have said, I knew from the first that our journey was not to be made in the interests of game. Also I had thought that my employers were in search of treasure.

But now, with the Pointe Noire as my destination, I knew not what to think. That Lafitte should have buried treasure in such a desolate, inaccessible place with its treacherous, shifting marsh was well nigh impossible. Also, even if treasure were there, my employers had brought aboard no pick, or spade, or other utensil with which to unearth it. What then was the object of their expedition?

All that morning the two held their place in the bow, and if they spoke to each other their words did not reach me. At noon, when I lay to and cooked their meal, their silence was the same. It was the dreadful, breathless silence of those who are waiting for something—for something that, when it comes, will not be good to see.

Once I made some remark about the prospects for game but no advantage was taken of my words. M'sieu St. Mar glanced hurriedly away toward the marsh to hide the torture in his eyes. M'sieu Prevost muttered something in his throat that had the sound of "*Dieu.*"

As for myself, I felt as if I had spoken in church; and when, their meal finished, the two departed for the bow again, I made the sign of the cross.

That was a journey to be remembered, m'sieu. It was like one of those terrible dreams in which one is divided between the desire to awake and the wish to sleep on and know the end.

WE MADE the Pointe Noire at sunset and stood in toward the ruined hut upon its tip, beneath a sky that was like blood.

Ah, m'sieu, that was a place to suit the mood of my employers. There was no beach, no marsh, no green of any kind. Only the rotten, wave-eaten bank, with its toppling hut and its litter of bones and shells. Back of the point the burned-out marsh lay black and lifeless, its pools and sloughs scummed thick with ashes until they were like the eyes of the blind. Upon three sides this desolation was shut in by the gray waters of the bay, while upon its fourth the great cypress-swamp lay rusty-red across the horizon. And over all that crimson sky burned slowly out like some beacon of disaster.

In silence we landed, in silence we ate our evening meal, and then when I felt that I could bear no more M'sieu St. Mar spoke.

"That swamp there?" he began. "How long would it take one to pass through it to Anse Le Vert?"

"That is hard to say, m'sieu," I replied, "since few care even to try its edge. One man, Jacques Bernard, went through without food or ammunition, and his story will be told while the last tall cypress stands. He says that he was inside many lifetimes, although he expected but two days."

"And if one were to have a compass and ammunition, what then?" asked M'sieu Prevost, speaking to me for the first time that day.

"Perhaps it would be the same, m'sieu," I returned. "There are still the poisons, the fevers, and above all the mosquitoes, to be conquered. You can not shoot a mosquito, m'sieu, yet in the swamp he is death."

"Yet my friend and I are going through," said M'sieu St. Mar. "We start at sunrise, without food, but with a compass and gun. You will go back and meet us at the narrow neck that runs out near Anse Le Vert."

For a while I was silent through sheer amazement. Then, gathering myself together, I spoke my word.

"M'sieu," said I, "I will not ask you if you are joking, since it is very evident that you are not. Also, as your affairs are your own, I will not ask you if you are mad. But if you and your companion are going to attempt the passage of that swamp, then must I take back some story to the mainland, wherewith to account for your deaths. I am waiting for the story, m'sieu."

At this M'sieu St. Mar smote his palms together like one who is well satisfied.

"Good," said he. "I knew that we would not be disappointed in you, Le Bossu."

M'sieu Prevost nodded, and for a moment his hand lay upon the shoulder of the other.

"Yes," he agreed. "Let us tell him all. It is his due."

Digitized by Google

And so they told me; and, as they did so, all the pent-up thoughts and words of that day burst forth in a torrent of speech. Also, strange though it may seem, I think that I understood. At least I grasped their idea, which was more than many would have done. Perhaps, in my poor words, you will find it hard yourself, m'sieu; but had you been there to hear them, you would have known.

THEY had been friends since childhood—the sort of friends that are closer than brothers. Living side by side in the city, sharing their pleasures, their griefs, even their youthful possessions, they had, at the age of manhood, become inseparable. Together they had entered business, together they had taken their leisure, spending long days in the wild in that close companionship which is born only of the tent and blanket.

And then, m'sieu, a woman came along—a woman with whom both fell in love. There was no jealousy, no bitterness, none of those dark things which are said also to be fair in war. Each loved deeply, each felt for the other, each offered unsuccessfully to sacrifice himself. Then there was nothing to do.

Ah, m'sieu, can you not see it? They could not fight, since there was no anger. They could not forego their chances, since both were firm in refusal. The friendship of each became even stronger, nourished by the thought of the other's pain. Yet ever in their hearts was a torment of hopeless love that gnawed unceasingly, driving them to despair.

And then, when all was at its worst, there came to them the story of Jacques Bernard. Perhaps you have heard it, m'sieu, of how Bernard, marooned upon the Pointe Noire, set forth through the swamp without food or ammunition to save his wife from the fever at Anse Le Vert.

The friends listened to the story, and when they had thought over it there came to them an idea. Bernard had faced the swamp through love of a woman. Why should they not do the same? Both were young, both were experienced, the chances would be equal.

If they started without food from different points, the god of Luck would decide the matter, sending the rare game of that desolate place to the fortunate one. From what they had heard it was inconceivable that both should win through. Therefore, he who was favored would have all clear before him. If both remained inside, it would still be as good a method as any of settling their difficulty.

Perhaps they were mad, m'sieu, but what could I do? That they were weary of their lot beyond argument was proven to me before I had uttered a dozen words.

"*Bien*," said I. "Your blood be upon your own heads! I will wait for you as you ask, but you must give me a paper explaining your disappearance. They would laugh at your story at Anse Le Vert."

"And how long will you wait for us?" asked M'sieu Prevost while M'sieu St. Mar wrote the paper.

"A week," I replied. "If you are not out by then, you will never be."

That night we slept in the hut and, when I awakened my employers at sunrise, they went about their preparations briskly. Each took a gun, some shells, a compass, blankets, and many matches. Also each drew for position, M'sieu St. Mar taking the bay, or outer side, M'sieu Prevost the one that was lost in the burnt-out marsh. Then, when all was ready, I gave them my final advice.

"Choose always high ground for camping, and sleep with your head in the smoke of your smudge," I told them. "Also, seek no trail. Bear ever east and, if you live, you will arrive."

At parting they shook hands in silence, despite the look in their eyes. Ah, m'sieu, who could describe that look, its weariness, its hope—its pain. It was as if each were saying to the other—"pray God you win," and to himself—"may I stay inside."

Yet I knew that each would strive to the bitter end through that scorn of death which alone had kept them both alive.

After they had gone I stood and watched them; and as they disappeared into the black desert that separated them from their goal, a vague, moving cloud formed slowly above the head of each. The wind blew stale and warm from an empty sky, and on it many other little clouds drifted silently in toward the swamp.

Thus I left the two, already in the grip of their enemies, while from far and near above that dreadful wilderness the tiny whining pests gathered together to seek the feast that was prepared for them.

Digitized by Google

AND so I returned whence I had come, m'sieu, and went up through the marsh to that narrow neck which the swamp thrusts out near Anse Le Vert. Four days I waited on my boat, and upon the fifth I took medicines and supplies, and made my way inside.

Perhaps I was mad to attempt it, yet there was that within me which drove me on. Indeed, had it not been for the sheer uselessness of it, I would have gone upon the first day.

You do not know, m'sieu. Those four days of waiting were a torture. All through them I sat upon the deck of my boat, gazing out at the rusty, prison-like walls of the swamp and thinking of what must be going on inside. All through them I came each moment to know better that dreadful suspense which had sealed the lips of my employers.

"No," I said to myself on that fifth day. "I can stand no more. If they are alive, they must by now be near the neck. I will go in one day's journey and meet them."

Now you, m'sieu, who have hunted much, have known times of hardship. I, who have hunted more, have known them also. Yet if all those times were rolled into one it would not be as an hour of that journey of mine.

True I had known swamps, having entered them often, but never had I known that there could be the like of that one near Anse Le Vert. Underfoot was the black, oily water, foul with decay, dotted with innumerable shiny cypress-knees that tripped the foot at every stride. Overhead was the dense, rusty canopy of leaf and branch, blotting out the clean blue of heaven, strangling the very air itself that sought to cleanse the poisons and vapors below. And between, the trees grew thick and close, shutting in the view on every side, each of them fluted, each of them tapering, until the mind grew sick with their monotony.

Of life there was naught save the snakes and turtles that dropped from their logs with a single, thumping splash. Of sound there was only the ceaseless whine of the mosquitoes that bit and stabbed with their tiny, poisoned bills.

It was terrible, m'sieu. It was like the dark, empty shell of a world in which all was dead save suffering and despair. That afternoon, when I could go no farther, I built my smudge upon a knoll, and there I lay half conscious amid the droning, whirling swarm of my tormentors.

But if that first day had been hard, the second was harder still, for I was bruised by a hundred falls, and already the poison was beginning to run in my veins. Yet that which was within me drove me ever forward, and so I went on, stumbling, tripping, calling aloud, until once more, near sunset, I made my camp upon a knoll. This time I drank deep of the brandy that I carried, and while it burned I took my reason in both hands.

"You have done enough, Bossu," I told myself. "Already you have gone too far. The two are lost beyond doubt. In the morning you will return."

Then, even as I made this decision, there came from afar a faint sound of splashing. Nearer it grew, while I ran forward shouting, and then, through one of the innumerable alleys of the tree-trunks, I saw the figure of a man.

Slowly he came, staggering and falling, and by the rags of his clothes I knew that it was M'sieu St. Mar. His face was swollen beyond recognition, his eyes were all but closed. From the puff of his lips there came an endless babble of words, and each time that he fell he screamed aloud. His gun was gone, also his blankets, but in one hand he still clutched the charred and mangled fragments of a turtle.

"M'sieu!" I cried, and for an instant reason flashed into his brain.

"Bossu!" he gasped. "Thank God."

Then he fell once more and, as he screamed, I caught the sound of a name that was Prevost.

After that it was work, with food, with brandy and with quinine, until near the break of dawn M'sieu St. Mar spoke with reason again. Also, as had been the case whenever the sharp points of the cypress-knees had driven the spark of consciousness into his brain, his first word was Prevost.

"You have found him?" he asked.

"No," I replied. "Nor will I ever do so. You have won, m'sieu."

But M'sieu St. Mar staggered to his feet in a sudden outburst, half delirium, half fury.

"Then go to him while I crawl behind," he cried. "Or I will crawl in front, if you have no courage in your soul."

"*Bien*, m'sieu," said I as quietly as I could. "But you must first regain some

Digitized by Google

strength. I am only doing the best that I can."

At this he lay back willingly enough, and as he did so his hand sought mine. Then he began to speak, slowly, with long pauses between his words.

"Forgive me, Jean," said he. "I know that you—will understand. Also, while my mind is clear, you must understand something else. You say that I have—won? I tell you that I have lost all—the greater love. We were mad, Jean. We did not know. The swamp has taught me—among other things. The woman-love was but one of months. Ours was from the beginning."

He lay a long time silent, and by the gray light of dawn I could see the shine of tears in his terrible eyes.

"Prevost!" he murmured. "My poor Prevost. We had gone through life hand in hand."

"As you will do again, if God is willing, m'sieu," I encouraged him. "Come, we must lay our plans. You have seen him—inside?"

"A million times in my delirium," replied M'sieu St. Mar. "Once at a moment when my mind was clear. It was this morning, and he was bearing north. Like myself he had lost his gun. I called to him—I waved my food—but he was worse than I, and could not hear. Then I fell, and when I got to my feet again he had disappeared. I was following him when you came along."

I shook my head.

"You were bearing east, the direction that was stamped upon your brain, m'sieu," said I. "Otherwise I would not have found you. But your words are encouraging. At noon, if you are able, we will bear north until nightfall. Then, if we would live, we must turn back. Better the one to die than all."

But M'sieu St. Mar made a movement of refusal.

"Better for you, Jean, yes, but not for me," he replied. "I will go on until the end."

We left at noon, and how M'sieu St. Mar forced his tortured, exhausted body into the effort, I can not say. Gasping, swaying, fighting hard his fever and his madness, he staggered along beside me, and as he went my own poor sufferings were forgotten in the greatness of his soul.

"*Dieu!*" I said to myself. "It is your end also, Bossu. Our search is useless, and tomorrow you will never leave him."

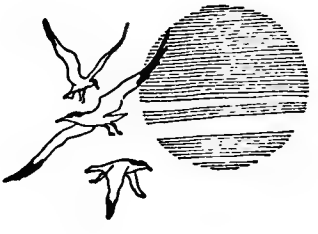
But God was good, and we found Prevost not three hours' journey from our knoll. He lay with his head in the hollow of a tree-trunk, a poor, tattered rag of a man who, having done all, could do no more. Speechless he was, and with tight-closed eyes, yet at the cry of his companion he staggered forward holding out both arms.

Thus they met and, in that gesture of M'sieu Prevost, I knew that he also had learned a lesson of the swamp.

AND then we came out, m'sieu. It took four days, and it was very hard. Perhaps another could describe it. I can not. There are some things of which one is unable to tell.

Afterward we regained our strength at Anse Le Vert, and when the two departed it was in that peace which had made the happiness of their younger days. Many gifts they gave me, but most precious of all was the memory that they left behind.

Ah, m'sieu, it means much to me—the little, twisted Bossu who is without a mate. Often, when all have gathered about the fire, I hear the others speak of that love of woman which I have never known. It is then that I smile to myself, who alone have seen that greater, rarer love of men.



Digitized by Google

FUGO *of* NAGASAKI

By Donald Francis McGrew

Author of "The Grenadier," "The Guns of the Seventy-Third," etc.

ON THE night before the arrival of the transport *Thomas* there stood in one of the darkest lanes in Nagasaki a Japanese youth named Fugo; and, as evinced by his furtive and restless attitude, his intentions were far from pacific.

In direct contrast to the usual optimism of the Japanese, Fugo was on the verge of pessimism. For, by all the gods of Buddha and Shinto, it had chanced that one Yo San, famous in the old-school wrestling world, had stepped between Fugo and the most honorable desire of his honorable heart—therefore, he, Fugo, would await the illustrious coming of the most base Yo San, and, in Jap-English "as she is spoke," endeavor to knock off his illustrious "conk."

The *casus belli* between Fugo and Yo San was a little mincing, almond-eyed Japanese girl of flashing teeth and immaculate toilet. Shades of his illustrious father, how Fugo desired her! The mere thought of her thrilled his Oriental heart like wine. More beautiful than the wistaria, he vowed; in comparison to the rest of the world, like the lotus-flower rising above the slime.

And she had been more than willing before that trip to the Philippines which he, tiring of the meager returns gained from passing coal off the lighters, had taken to engage in trade for the good of his pocketbook. He had made much American money, but on his return there was a new god enshrined in her heart—this gross Yo San, this terrible wrestler, this huge Goliath whose prowess had overshadowed Fugo's yen, good looks, and ardent longing.

Therefore Fugo waited.

But he did not have long to wait. The sound of silvery laughter, seconded by notes of a heavier timbre, preceded the appearance of a gigantic form from the direction of the near-by pagoda. It came crunching down the path like an arrogant knight of old, and then, gritting his teeth, Fugo leaped.

For weeks, with this meeting in view, Fugo had practised at the new ju-jutsu. He sought at the first to gain the deadly juggler hold. But, for the sake of Fugo's dignity, we will draw a curtain over the result. Not wishing to adorn the limbs of a near-by cherry-tree for eternity, Fugo climbed down along in the wee small hours and limped home a sadder and much wiser man.

THE memory of this was rankling still when Fugo started out the next morning for the transport *Thomas*. That vessel, having dropped anchor in the blue harbor, was now entirely surrounded by a fleet of coal-barges and

Digitized by Google

sampans, while her decks were aswarm with visiting officials, curio venders, and a regiment of United States cavalry en route home from the Islands.

Since sighting the blue-black, white-capped mountains of Japan, they had been drinking in the keen air with the relish of those who meet the temperate zone after a long sojourn in the tropics; and now, though their thin blood ran cold in the chill of the Japanese "little Spring," they clustered at the rail, viewing the new sights, eagerly awaiting the word to go ashore.

Said Tulares, M Troop's heavyweight, as he glanced at the swarms of Jap coolies passing coal in baskets off the barges—

"They chatter like a bunch of magpies, don't they?"

McChesney grinned over a mouthful of egg sandwich.

"Why the grouch?" he asked.

Tulares produced a peso and slammed it down at the vender.

"Gimme four egg sandwiches and about four tons of green stuff to take the taste of this —— steamed cooking out of my mouth," he growled. Then to McChesney, "That 'coffee-cooler' has taken my shore leave away."

"What for?"

"For having a rusty gun at inspection. Who ever heard of inspection aboard a transport, anyway, when you've got to keep cosmoline on the guns to keep them from rusting?"

"Aw, tell your troubles to the marines," O'Hearn broke in. "Youse can enjoy the scenery while I'm taking one ashore."

Tulares looked out at the scene, which, with a background of blue and white, presented a contrast of cheerful colors which materially abetted the exhilarating effect of the sharp air. But he had no eyes for the red, black and gray ships, the scurrying white government launches, the big fishing sampans shooting seaward under the strokes of their blue-clad crews, nor the myriad of brown and silver herons that, flashing above them in the sun, dipped and wheeled as if imbued with the buoyancy of the happy scurrying life beneath. All this but added to his temper, and, with a grunted "—— the scenery," Tulares betook himself, his sandwiches and his grouch down the forward companionway.

"He'll growl for the next month," grinned McChesney. "But say—look at that Jap coming across the barges. Don't we know him?"

"Fugo, or I'm a liar!"

"That's Fugo—used to be muchacho for M Troop at Overton. Got himself a shop and finally beat it home."

"And he's the bo can show us the cigarette-trees and the big rock-candy mountains in this little village, too. Hey, there—heave up alongside, you little runt." And, when Fugo came aboard, "Where'd you get that eye?"

"Him receive' in mos' honorable combat," was all Fugo would vouchsafe. "When you go ashore my mos' illustrious city?"

A cry of "Down below the passes," rang out, and O'Hearn grinned.

"Right now," said he, and scurried down the companionway.

So it happened that as sampan after sampan pulled away, one of them carried O'Hearn, Grogan, Todd, McChesney, A'Dare, Harris and the illustrious Fugo; and the Colonel, chancing to note this particular craft, rubbed his mustache thoughtfully.

Until nightfall came, however, his mental predictions had not been fully verified. That Todd had attempted to deliver a speech from the top of a *matsuris* juggernaut was true, but otherwise their conduct had been decorous and proper. A mob met them at the shore howling "Ohaio—jinrikisha?" whereupon each hired a miniature baby-carriage for their adventurous travels and began a round of the bazaars and tea-houses. They stopped frequently to oil their quickening tongues, but eight bells found them halted at Wo Lee's chophouse, pausing as it were for breath after a rather uneventful day.

"We will call the roll now," said the solemn Todd. "I see we are minus one worthy exponent of the liberty or death clause—to wit, one Grogan."

"Last I saw of Grogan, some one had bombarded him from hidden fortifications. He stopped to investigate."

"Let us pray then for the investigatee, so to speak. What have we here?"

"A gentleman from France——" began A'Dare, when the gentleman in question aroused to wave his glass in an astatic orbit.

"*Ma belle roulante*——" he began in questionable tenor.

"Spare us!"

"Back up!"

Digitized by Google

"Hello, here's another discovery!" O'Hearn shook the man, a sailor belonging to a detachment of "casuals" going home for discharge. "Heave up alongside and partake," grinned O'Hearn.

"Who wants to fight?" inquired the drowsy sailor.

"Far be it from such," Todd answered. "Internal friction is tabooed. Fugo—" turning to that little statue in bronze—"as a host you are punk. You have brought us ashore to show us the town, yet not one thing have we viewed that would stir the pulse. We want to be stirred——"

"Stewed, you mean."

"No, stirred."

"Stirred we will be!"

"Silence, gentlemen!" Todd cut in. "Fugo, what have you got to say for yourself?"

"I vote we kick the socks off him!" said the aroused sailor.

"*Vive la France!*" shouted Frenchy.

"Gently, brother, gently, pray!" soothed Todd. "Fugo, it's up to you to produce."

"Well," said Fugo, after a minute's hesitation—and who can fathom the Oriental mind?— "there is one wrestle match, which perhaps will not interes' the most honorable gentlemen. I can not from the dep's of my mos' kind heart take you there. But—we will visit the Bazaar Beautiful. It is wonderful—it is mos' gran'——"

"Well, what the ——"

"And he never said a word——"

"A wrestling match——"

"Lead on, McDuff!" said Todd, and took Fugo by the ear.

WITNESS, then, this gallant phalanx heading into an amphitheater resembling somewhat the enclosure around a circus. An elevated platform, sprinkled with sand, rose in the center, while above it stretched a canopy of gaudy colors, its rim hung thick with Japanese lanterns. On a level with this and to one side rose another structure of bamboo, fittingly divided into boxes for the wealthier patrons, and shoving through the poorer crowd on the sandy ground Fugo led the way to one of these.

Even as they climbed the tortuous ladders the crowd applauded heartily. Their eyes turned to the stage. On it two ponderous giants stood for an instant with arms outstretched, then, doffing the bright lambrequins about their waists, they stood forth all but naked and crouched upon the sands like two bulldogs about to leap. The referee, austere and solemn, stood near them, fan in hand.

"What for a show is this?" McChesney wanted to know.

"Playin' leap-frog, I guess."

"Naw—they're havin' a tea party."

"Desist, you underground savage," snorted Harris at the sailor. "We will let them persist in their antics awhile, and then——"

But here the referee snapped his fan. The wrestlers leaped, but were called back again.

"I say," A'Dare nudged Fugo. "Who's that horse with the Roman nose?"

"That, mos' honorable, is the mos' illustrious Yo San, mos' strong champeen in Japan."

"Ten yen on Yo San!" yelled A'Dare.

"I too bet on Yo San!" said Frenchy.

"What do you know about him?"

"I liv' here de tree year, m'sieu. He is de gran' champeen!"

"That so, Fugo?"

Fugo took his yen from an elaborate coiffure in a near-by box.

"I tol' you, honorable frien'. No one in the worl' may whip or throw heem."

"What?" they roared.

"Well, say now——"

"Lemme at him once——"

"Why——"

But at this juncture the platform shook as if a hurricane had gone abroad. The giants had fairly caught their holds. They tugged, braced, shoved this way and that; then suddenly one shifted, came a slap of flesh on flesh as Yo San secured a new hold—and *crash!* Yo San had thrown his opponent over his head to the ground below.

Pandemonium reigned in the theater.

"That boy's *there!*" grunted one of the soldiers.

"*I'll* say he is!" declared another.

Yo San, flushed and victorious, again donned his lambrequin and bowed to the audience. Fugo's teeth ground as he noted Yo San bowing to that particular part of the crowd where two little hands applauded in an ecstasy. But now the dapper referee held up his hand to address the people.

"Talk United States!" O'Hearn cried after a moment.

"I will interpret," offered Fugo. "The honorable Yo San has throw three men

Digitized by Google

this eve. He now exten', as is the mos' honorable custom, a challenge to all the worl'."

"What?"

"Of course it is but a courtesy. No one dare accep'."

"No? Why, say," bawled the sailor, "for fifty cents I'll guarantee to knock the swab plumb through his dungarees!"

Amazement fell on the crowd like a stroke. Yo San and the referee now turned toward the noisy box, and Yo San, seeing Fugo, grinned maliciously. The referee inquired the cause of the uproar.

"What's he say?" asked Jackie.

Fugo demurred.

"No, you mus' not. He will ——"

"What did he say?"

"My mos' honorable frien', he will kill you."

The sailor's move was eloquent.

"Well," sighed Fugo, "being force', I will say he say he be mos' glad to break the mos' honorable neck!"

The Jackie's hands went back behind his neck to "doff" his blouse. A leap, and he was in the ring.

"No leap-frog in mine," he cried. "Stand up and go to it like a man."

This interpreted, Yo San shrugged nonchalantly. The crowd sighed with delight as Jackie, his head sunk between his shoulders, "squared off" pugnaciously.

"Look out, Yo San," yelled the Frenchman. "Eef you don' comprehen' *la boxe*, he make *la swainge* and knock off de block!"

"You poor remnant of Waterloo!" snorted Todd. "Of course he will. Bet you the yellow peril don't last two minutes."

"Done!" And money changed hands rapidly. "And now," yelled O'Hearn, "don't let the poor geek suffer much—just put him away very easy like."

"Hey, Jackie," called Todd, "postpone that funeral just a minute." Both principals paused and looked around. "Fugo, does any of that crowd down there want to wager any of their ill-gotten gains?"

"That's right," called several soldiers. "We've got dough that's never been spent—" which they now produced—"and we want action." They began dumping the money into one hat as Fugo interpreted.

The Japs cheered wildly and covered the bets in a twinkling.

"Now," said Todd, "let the funeral go on."

But the referee had returned to the back of the stage, produced a sack of money, and, returning, tossed it over to Fugo. He addressed the latter with a smile.

"What's he say?"

"He say, my frien's, that he like to have this bet, too."

"Is it for him?"

"For Yo San, honorables."

They covered all of it.

"Is that all he says?" they demanded.

"Yo San, he say this is mos' unusual—he don' comprehen' the stand-up way of the honorable Americans. However, he be mos' glad to subdue the amusing effort of any the American people!"

"Wow!"

"The nerve of him!"

"Answer him, Todd!"

"Yea, yea—speech, speech!" came from all sides.

Nothing loth, Todd arose.

"Friends and yellow brethren——"

"Yellow brethren is good. Go on, go on!"

"We are assembled here to witness the downfall of yonder gross travesty on the beauteous human form——"

"Yea, yea!"

"And to glory in the downfall thereof. Gaze upon his fatuous smile! He stands forth on his comedy legs, pushes his chest out like an Irish washerwoman and defies us to our faces. Who, by the Emanuel eagle-eyed Esophagus Jones, would refuse to give up his shekels and even his life-blood to subdue this pompous challenger?"

"No one, no one!"

"Good. Allow me then, to introduce to you our champion, 'One Punch' Jones, champ of the Asiatic squadron, an honor to the American flag. His gums turn blue in the full of the moon; his left is the hospital, his right is death. At him, old boy, and toss him over the moon!"

The crowd cheered, and Jackie, ham-handed and belligerent, went for Yo San like a wildcat.

BUT what need to go further? Previous to this we saved Fugo's dignity. It would only be fair to save our own. Fifteen minutes later there was not an American left in the place; for who would care to remain in the vicinity of a lot of dwarfed maniacs who stand on their heads, turn handsprings, and yell with

Digitized by Google

delight as you carry the wrecked remains of your valiant champions to a welcome obscurity? Flesh and blood could not stand it.

"Do you think I'll ever be the same man?" groaned Jackie.

"And me!" moaned McChesney. "Whatever possessed me to go in there after I saw you get yours?"

"Ha, ha!" gloated Frenchy. "What deed I say? The American is so —— smart——"

He had been lucky, but here his luck changed. Frenchy vacated. When O'Hearn returned he wore the rim of a Parisian hat and the remnants of a Rue Belvedere coat.

"Who said we were licked?" he queried.

He gazed belligerently around at the tearful and wild-eyed group.

"I say I'm licked," said the sailor.

"Yes, but you ain't the whole ship."

"Gentlemen——" began Todd.

"Dry up! After that spiel! Oh, what will the rest of the fellows say when they hear about this?"

"Didn't he say he'd be there awhile yet?"

Fugo nodded weary assent.

"But the mos' honorable gentlemen had best stay away. Hope is no more."

"You mean no one in this regiment can lick that guy?"

Fugo appeared to be thinking.

"There is jus' one hope, now I recall. There is one who has the illustrious fist like the size of a horse's head——"

"Listen to that now!"

"And one pair of shoulders like the ancient *torrii* gate. His name is ——"

"What are you talking about?"

"His name, honorables, is two—two——"

"Tulares!" gasped the delighted O'Hearn. "Say, some one kick me. Some one please kick me." He was already started for the door, with a gradually growing and highly excited mob at his heels.

Meanwhile the Colonel and his officers had accepted the invitation of a number of port officials to come ashore and tour the city. The rounds terminated that evening at one of the tourist hotels. After the outing of the afternoon, the evening's formalities had grown somewhat irksome, and the Colonel was stifling a yawn when a faint commotion in the distance swelled to a roar and drew ever nearer. Conversation languished into uneasy murmurs.

"A riot?"

"Quite probable, sir, if K Troop is at large," said Captain Stensland with a covert grin at the commander of K.

Captain Baker snorted.

"More likely M Troop. Listen to that now."

The orderly was heard remonstrating with some one on the veranda.

"What do they want?" called Stensland.

"Private O'Hearn wishes to speak to you, sir, on a very important matter, he says."

As Stensland stepped out, the Colonel allowed his own curiosity to overcome him momentarily, and he joined the group at the window. A low murmur reached their ears. Then a deafening cheer rent the air.

"Well, Captain, what was the nature of the disturbance?" asked the Colonel when Stensland returned.

"Rather extraordinary, sir—rather extraordinary. It seems that some of my men have become engaged in a sort of athletic contest with ——"

"The police?"

"Oh, no, sir. Perfectly legitimate, sir, perfectly legitimate. They accepted a challenge, sir, from a certain notorious wrestler, who was, I gather, rather irritating in his manner. They——"

"Did they—er—win?"

"Well, as I gather it, sir, hardly. Two of the men are at present badly in need of repairs."

At this some of the Japanese officials suppressed a grin. The Colonel became dignified.

"They allowed themselves to be beaten, then? What was the nature of their request?"

"They wished me to release Private Tulares, whom I restricted to the confines of the ship for showing a dirty rifle at inspection."

"Did you—er—grant the request?"

"I—well—I may say I did, sir. Quite unmilitary, but of course, sir ——"

Silence fell on the group as they waited for the Colonel's answer. Then young Randal, eying the door uneasily, even eagerly, spoke up.

"Colonel, I fear I'll have to extend my regrets to my hosts and thanks for a most delightful evening, but I left my wife at the Bazaar, you know ——"

"Exactly, Mr. Randal, exactly. Why, where is Captain Baker?"

Digitized by Google

"Captain Baker became suddenly indisposed, sir. He begged to extend his regrets."

Five minutes later the Colonel and Captain Stensland faced each other with rather sheepish grins. The Colonel rubbed his goatee thoughtfully.

"Ahem! Captain, remarkable cases of indisposition, what? Er—did Private O'Hearn designate the—er—exact location of this expected combat?"

The Colonel was forced to follow the Captain at a rather sharp pace through the door in order to get his answer.

A rush of jinrikishas had preceded them up the street. The Captain caught one trailer, accosted him sharply, and turned to the Colonel.

"It seems, sir, that Private Tulares took matters into his own hands before the men got to the boat, sir."

"By the sounds up there," exclaimed the Colonel suddenly, "I should think that he had! I think we'd better investigate."

And the sight that met their eyes made it obvious that Tulares *had* taken matters into his own hands. For, with the coming of darkness, Tulares had become minus one recently acquired olive-drab overcoat and plus twenty pesos in money, two of which had gone to a gangway guard, the rest the way of impulse and opportunity. Of the latter and the resultant adventures much might be written; but they do not matter, save that Tulares, all unconscious of the frenzied search for him, walked arrogantly into the square just as the searchers came up one side and a howling mob of Japs came into the other. At the head of this strode Yo San, who, having grown tired of waiting for more Americans, had started homeward, accompanied perforce by a mob grown wild with the carnival spirit and the worship of their victorious hero.

For a moment Tulares hesitated. The oncoming pageant made a strange spectacle with its bobbing lanterns and banners, and it threatened for a space to override him. Tulares gave a grunt then of displeasure and strode forward straight at the pageant.

At sight of him some of the forerunners decided they had met a personage, and gladly gave him room. For his shoulders, square and immense, bulged hard against his blouse; his chest curved out in proportion; and his walk was rangy, springy, confident, bespeaking a tiger-like control of muscles given only to perfect athletes. They parted before him and left him standing for an electrical moment before Yo San.

Neither moved. Instinctively, each knew the other for an enemy.

"Well," said Tulares, "do you want the whole street?"

He did not pause to consider that he was asking a great deal himself. But Yo San did. The latter, with an impatient exclamation, reached out a confident hand to shove aside this intruder who blocked his path. And then——

WHAT happened then makes great troop history, told with many slaps on the leg and much emphasis to admiring recruits. There are many accounts, as the cyclone of fists that struck Yo San was too swift for mental photography, let alone for Yo San. There have been some arguments as to whether Tulares abused Yo San first on the "jugglar" or in the region of the "pentecostal" muscles, but that is really immaterial. There were some jinrikishas back of Yo San; suffice it to say they have not been repaired to this day. Yo San departed in their direction.

"Disgraceful!" said the Colonel; but they slipped away in the noise, and the Colonel is blamed for a case that reached Wo Lee's chop-house later on. The celebration ensuing was one that set a high mark in the annals of the troop; many recruits got themselves "into the mill" trying to equal it on later hilarious occasions.

Strangely, no one missed Fugo. But Fugo did not appear again that night. He spent it sitting on a lone curbstone, talking to himself. For when Tulares had so convincingly relegated Yo San to the realms of the "has beens," Fugo had rushed to the side of his former fiancée in glee, only to find her gazing, with her whole admiring soul in her eyes, at this most wonderful American who had handled her previously incomparable Yo San as one would a child. Which had not been what Fugo anticipated.

"After my mos' strenuous effort, too," mused Fugo. "Don' that beat the mos' honorable——?"

Digitized by Google

SQUARE ALL 'ROUND

By A. E. Dingle

Author of "Blind Luck of St. Paul."

AFLOAT, the convict hulk lay swinging on the shimmering waters of the bay. Ashore, the convicts sweltered at their soul-searing tasks in savage gangs under the blistering tropic sun. Ring of pick, clash of shovel, jangling and creaking of chains, were blended with the booming of the surf as it thundered along the rugged coast. And above all rose the fervid oaths of the warders who stood, gun in hand, keeping sharp watch on the desperate bands of felons at their labors.

Martinets were these warders, of the old Australian convict days, who had rubbed shoulders with the world in many lands and on many seas; men of iron hearts and steel hands, striking first and speaking afterwards. And, as was intended, the crime-hardened convicts quaked in their grim presence.

But even those men of blood and iron had soft places in their case-hardened hearts—all but "Nutty" Armstrong, a rugged, black-browed, stalwart sergeant, who had been so long in his unsavory business that even his mates said his heart had become ossified. His nose was blue from rum, his mouth was black from tobacco, his face scored with old cuts, and his body was covered in tattoo with anchors, mermaids, dolphins and devils.

Nutty was as devoid of feeling as the Sphinx. A poor devil under his charge might do his level best in hope of earning respite, but if Nutty did not like him—and the chances were big that he would not—he was marked forever. Let him strain and sweat, carrying monster stones down to the breakwater, let him curse or weep, it made no difference, Nutty never let up on him. His reward was a blow with the butt of a rifle, a clout with the side of a cutlass, a plain punch on the nose, or a savage kick with an iron-shod boot. Or he might be lucky enough to escape bodily abuse and only be half-starved, and deprived of his only solace—tobacco. And with the additional terrors at hand of the dark cell, or the triangles with the cat-o'-nine-tails, small wonder was it that Nutty lorded it over his sweltering, floating hell like the royal devil he was.

Then one day, under the awful stress of Nutty's diabolical persecutions, Willie Ogilvie died—a poor, weak-willed lad of mild disposition, whose cheerful good-nature and readiness to help bear the heavy burdens of

Digitized by Google

his rough mates had earned him a measure of little-suspected gratitude. Wherefore, Ned Blake, Black Jack, Red Ryan and Archie Sloss, all of whom had experienced Willie's gentleness and Nutty's savagery, vowed vengeance on the black-browed murderer.

By day six hundred convicts slaved ashore; at night they were trooped aboard the hulk, an old three-decker. Down on the orlop deck, in the bowels of the ship, the four conspirators lived—if such a life could be called living—along with two hundred more like them, half on the port and half on the starboard side, two rows of iron railings dividing one compartment from the other—two pens of wild beasts of the wildest. And along the dark, narrow passage between the two halves, all through the night paced a warder—watch and watch—four hours duty, eight hours spell.

ON THIS night the clatter of dishes at supper had ceased; tables had been cleared, hammocks were lowered, and the two hundred soul-weary wretches had turned in. The heavy breathing of utterly worn-out men, broken now and then by the howl of a sleeper in nightmare, mingled with the thunder of the surf along the shore outside.

At eight bells, midnight, the warder and his relief conversed for a moment at the foot of the companion ladder—then one went and the other remained to take up his dreary tramp. Over in the darkest corner of the port-side Red Ryan lay awake, and his hand crept out to give a gentle tug at Ned Blake's blanket.

"It's him—Nutty," he whispered; and Ned rose in his hammock, dropped silently to the deck and awakened Black Jack and Archie Sloss.

The four huddled together for a moment, then, falling on their knees, they crawled like cats to the iron gate whose heavy padlock was supposed to be human-ingenuity-proof. At the gate they lay at full length, watching, biding their time. Presently the warder rested a moment, yawning, at the far end of the dim corridor, and Ned Blake arose with a short bar of iron in his hand—a crowbar which he had brought from the shore, hidden in his breeches-leg.

"Are ye ready?" he whispered.

"Aye, all ready," came the reply.

A heavy blow with the bar, muffled with the corner of the blanket, and off came the padlock with a dull, smothered sound. The ghostly echo startled the sentry out of his reverie, and he stalked along the alleyway, peering cautiously to port and starboard.

"A rat," said he.

Before the words had well left his lips, four knives found a sheath in his heart, and with one horrible gurgle he passed out. Then the four men dragged his quivering body through the gate, and, aflame with evil passions at thought of poor Willie Ogilvie, they quartered the body and heaved the portions into the mess-kids.

Now through the bars two hundred ghastly faces peered, wide awake and ripe for outbreak, while curses ran along with the chorus:

"A bad passage to the black-hearted devil! Come on now, down with the rest!"

But the hulk burst into life from stem to stern; lanterns flitted all about like gigantic fireflies, upper deck, main deck, and at last down in the dark bowels of the floating hell. And in the very center of the circle of light gleamed the evil face of Nutty Armstrong.

Then Ned Blake, Red Ryan, Black Jack, and Archie Sloss joined in one mad howl of thwarted rage. They had killed the wrong man!

"Hands up!" roared Nutty, "Hands up!"

The rising was quelled with the suddenness of death, but in the hubbub Archie broke and ran forward, getting clear to the forecastle, where he crept down the hawse-pipe into the silent water and struck out for the shore.

As he cowered among the rocks his eyes glued themselves to the picture of the hulk, now a blaze of light, and a shudder shook him like an ague when he saw three figures dangling from three yard-arms; and floating across the bay came the ominous sounds which told him that close search was afoot for an ornament to decorate the fourth.

ARCHIE had made his way up-country by long and painful night marches, leaving the dreaded hulk far behind him. He soon fell in with two kindred spirits in Nat Bell and Bob Flint, and the trio naturally took to cattle-lifting for a living. They ploughed the old furrow, driving a man's cattle off the station at night, burning out the brands and selling them to somebody else a hundred miles

Digitized by Google

away. A business run on such lines could not fail to show a profit; they helped themselves, paying nothing and selling quickly.

And by way of variety, when the monotony of such easy money palled, they changed the process and stuck a man up and cleaned him out; until between the two methods the gang acquired an unwelcome notoriety, and were in great demand with the police. When the going got too hot for them they made for a snug retreat, away in the trackless bush, which they had prepared for just such an emergency, and which nature herself had helped to make well-nigh invulnerable to such pests as officers of the law.

Here they stayed, hearing nothing, seeing nothing, for weeks, until Archie, growing tired of the inaction, saddled his nag one morning and rode off to glean some news of what was doing. Scouring the bush all day he had been able to discover no signs of pursuit, and had already begun to form fresh schemes for plunder. But as he drew near the retreat at sundown, his quick eye caught sight of a thin spiral of smoke curling up through the tall gum-trees.

"The blasted fools!" he cried. "The —— idiots, to go to work and give the whole show away for the sake of their hungry bellies."

For it was a crime against all the understood ethics of the bush to light a fire until after nightfall: no billy was ever boiled, no damper cooked, by daylight. But the damage was done and it was worse than he had imagined. He hadn't gone many steps before he came upon signs of a conflict—broken boughs, ferns and twigs, smeared with and lying in pools of blood.

"The bloodhounds!" cried Archie, using the term usually applied to the bush police. "The bloodhounds!"

And throwing caution over his shoulder he galloped up to the fire.

The cave-mouth yawned wide open, denuded of the artfully contrived screen of foliage which had made the entrance well-nigh invisible; the ground was churned up with hoofprints and the floor of the den strewn with tattered clothes and bloody blankets. In a flash he had dismounted and was inside the cave. Beds of ferns were scattered to the four corners; empty bottles, chunks of damper, shirts, shoes, flour, tobacco, sugar, a tattered pack of cards—all the litter of a camp in the bush—but no Nat, no Bob. The whole picture of that dark interior was sufficient evidence for Archie of what had happened.

Kicking the litter right and left he strode in a passion to the darkest recess of the cave, and groping in a fissure drew forth a long convict's stocking. This was the treasure chest of the gang, and a feeling of relief came over the solitary bushy to find it intact. Weighing it in his hands as if to gauge its contents, Archie pondered a moment in doubt.

"No, I'll take only my fair share, like an honest man should," said he to himself. "Besides, I may be pinched myself before I get clear—who knows? And there'll be something anyhow for a rainy day if ever one of us comes back."

It was not a spontaneous conclusion he came to by any means, for he argued with himself long and earnestly before taking the step. He thought Nat and Bob would surely get a "lifer" for their little shortcomings, even if they were still alive—which was doubtful, in view of the signs of the scrimmage outside—and if they had put any of their captors out of action they would get the rope, that was sure. And then again, they would not think of him if they were in the same position.

But in the end, after hesitating longer than he thought he ought to have done, he took his just share of the swag in hard cash and notes, and flinging the stocking back into its hiding-place he stumbled out into the night, mounted his horse and bolted into the gloomy depths of the ghostly bush.

And down in that scorched patch of the island continent, with its population of two parts—one part inside the broad arrow, the other part engaged in keeping them there—it was a nine days wonder, the capture of Nat and Bob, and the lucky escape of the badly wanted Archie Sloss.

THE bark *Slievegallion*, homeward bound, lay at her anchor in Freemantle waiting for a slant of wind to start her on her long passage.

In the forenoon, while the skipper was stumping the poop, cursing the heat, and willing to forfeit his hope of glory for a breeze, a very respectable man stepped aboard from a shore-boat to engage a passage home. He might have been any one of a dozen things: shepherd, stock-rider, rail-splitter, roustabout, anything would have fitted in with his appearance. Dressed

Digitized by Google

in a suit of Scotch tweed, wearing a Scotch cap, and with an accent like Mountain Dew, he was sufficiently distinguishable from his fellow-men, even without his predominant feature, which was a huge, crooked hump on his broad back. The skipper hailed him:

"Well, mister, and what d'ye want aboard here? Time's short; we sail today."

"Can ye give me a passage home, Captain? I've the siller to pay, if ye're no too hard on a poor man," said the stranger.

"Have you got thirty pounds?" queried the skipper. "For that's what it'll cost you."

The Scot grumbled and pleaded poverty, offering twenty and producing the hard metal.

The Captain haggled over the difference, but the sight of the hard cash was a convincing argument, and pounds were pounds when they came by way of perquisite, and were not for the firm's pocket. Finally he growled—

"See here, mister——"

"Donald Macvittie."

"Mister Macvittie, there's a spare bunk for'rard in the bo'sun's room, with him and the cook and a sick passenger who's going home—not that he'll ever get there—and you can have that for the twenty."

"It'll be verra close quarters, Cap'n," objected Donald.

"Well, you can sleep aft with the steward for the other ten," was the old man's final word.

However, Donald shook his head, took a chew of tobacco, thought over that extra ten for a moment, then paid the twenty and went forward to look at his berth. His baggage consisted of a long oilskin-covered bag, a stock-whip and a saddle; and he pitched the lot into a bunk and sat down on the cook's sea-chest to look things over. The bunk above the one he had claimed had an occupant already; he could hear labored breathing behind the drawn curtain, and he decided that it was the sick passenger whom the Captain had spoken about.

HE WAS whittling a pipeful of tobacco with a murderous knife when the bo'sun, a hairy shell-back, black from his work, shoved his head in at the door and said—

"Here, matey, you're wanted aft in the cabin—the old man wants to see you."

"Right y'are," grunted Donald, carefully sticking his knife into its sheath at his hip, and, putting his hand to his hump as if it were paining him, he walked aft and entered the cabin.

The skipper was talking with two uniformed policemen.

"He ain't aboard of us, I hope you're satisfied. Been all over the ship, haven't you? Take another peg of whisky—say when."

The officers raised their glasses towards the skipper.

"Here's luck and a good voyage, Captain."

Then, as Donald entered—

"Here's one of my passengers," said the old man, by way of introduction. "Mr. Macvittie, these are officers from Freemantle. They've come aboard to look for Archie Sloss, the bushranger. You're not him, are you?"

The two policemen caught sight of Scottie's hump, and it tickled them to uproarious mirth.

"Mebbe ye'd like to feel it, gentlemen," said Donald with a snarl. "Put yer fins on it and have a real laugh."

The bluecoats only laughed the more.

"All right, Sandy, you'll do. Off you pop; and here, you can take one of these with you, it'll do to read you to sleep. There's two hundred pounds waiting for somebody to pick up. I guess, Captain, your other passenger, poor Nutty Armstrong, would die a lump easier if he knew that reward had been taken up."

Donald took the paper, setting forth the crimes of one Archibald Sloss, escaped convict, murderer, bushranger, and stuffed it in his pocket. Then he slouched out on deck where he filled his pipe and stood gloomily gazing out over the rail at the burning shore, and the sea devoid of wind; while the policemen dropped into their boat and were pulled aboard a Yankee whaler to continue their search.

Donald watched them with a grim smile and growled under his mustache:

"So it's Nutty for'rard there, is it? And dying, too, by all accounts. You bet he'd die laughing if he could get Archie before he snuffed. But he won't get him now, and—" spitting his words after the police-boat—"you won't find him there either, you bleeding man-hunters."

The wind blows sometimes even in Western Australia, and as the dawn crept over the Indian Ocean the *Slievegallion* broke

Digitized by Google

out her anchor and sheeted home her topsails to the tune of the famous old chanty:

> Oh! Sally Brown was a bright mulatto,
> Way! Heigh! Roll and go.

And many a poor devil, sweating at his burden and chafing in his irons ashore, heard the song and cursed—cursed the hulk, the warders, the sun, the sea, and cursed the bark getting under way because she reminded them of their chains.

In spite of his hump, Donald proved himself a good messmate and excellent company. He had no fear of Nutty recognizing him, after he had passed the scrutiny of the officers who had been searching for him. He had full confidence in his altered appearance, and he took the earliest opportunity to let the sick man take a good look at him; and he smiled with satisfaction when Nutty gave not the slightest sign of recognition.

He was hail-fellow in the little cabin; he bargained with the cook for many a titbit from the skipper's table, and paid cash; and his stick of tobacco was always at the service of the hairy bo'sun. The bo'sun and he were soon fast cronies, though Donald skinned him to his shirt at cut-throat or any other game of chance they elected to play. In the dog-watches and on starry nights he spun them many a blood-curdling yarn of the bush, convicts, shootings, stabbings, murder and sudden death.

He had known all the desperate characters whose names had made Australian penal history; but never had he known such a desperado as that Archie Sloss everybody was talking about. And here he would pull out the reward sheet and read it by the cabin lamp to give point to his tale, furtively watching the sick man as he read, for mention of Sloss's name always brought a spasm of rage or hate to the haggard face in the upper berth.

And the sick man, obviously doomed never to see the home coast again, worshipped the crooked-backed Scotchman. Who was it gave him cooling drinks of lime-juice on red-hot days? Donald. Who helped him dress? Who led him about the deck on fine days to give him a mouthful of fresh air? Who never tired of his fretful complainings, and always found a piece of canvas to fan his fevered head so that he might sleep? Why, Donald did all this, and there never was a man like him.

But the passenger grew whiter and weaker with every knot the ship made on her course; the cook said he was a goner; the bo'sun discussed Davy Jones; the Captain could only feed him as well as he could and await the end, and even Donald said with a grunt that the poor devil was all in.

One wild night off the Horn, the cook was cursing in the galley, the bo'sun was cursing on deck; the crew were surely cursing aloft amidst the lashing and smashing of thundering canvas, and the vicious twanging of top's'l-sheet chains; the skipper hung to a life-line on the poop and cursed himself black in the face, bawling orders that couldn't be heard, into the black void aloft, to the men who couldn't be seen. Donald was reading in his bunk as well as that feat could be accomplished by the flickering flame of a sputtering, stinking, slush-lamp, and the sick man lay groaning over his head.

The ship was one moment borne high on the crest of a sea, the next buried to the rails in the belly of a Cape Horn roarer. The thumping seas dropped aboard her like truck-loads of solid green; while the clank of scupper-ports, the tramping and bawling of men in a frenzy of work, all added their bit to the general uproar.

In the midst of the commotion Donald looked up and saw a wasted hand from the bunk above beckoning to him, and he got up to see what was the matter.

"I'm going fast, Donald," whispered the sick man.

Donald gave him a keen look, as if to make sure, and a grim smile as of triumph crossed his face, to be instantly smoothed out.

"Well?" he asked.

"Donald, quick, there's three hundred pounds in my box—will you see that my old mother gets it?"

"Sure," said Donald. "Where'll I find her?"

The directions given, the dying man said—

"Now feel under my pillow, Donald."

Donald groped and brought out a Bible.

"Kiss the book, Donald."

Donald kissed it.

"Good-by, Donald, good-by; you've been white, and you'll get your reward."

Then a great sea crashed aboard, pouring through the crevices of the door-frame and washing up over the lower bunk. The

Digitized by Google

dying man gasped, but Donald never budged, though up to his knees in water.

Now the Scot's features underwent a startling change. He shook the sick man fiercely.

"Oh!" muttered the poor wretch, his mind already wandering into the beyond. "Oh! Mercy, mercy!"

"Look at me," roared Donald. "Listen. Take a good look at me, Nutty Armstrong."

A vague something in the man's altered tones caused the dying man to raise himself with a start and peer into the face beside him.

"Ah, Nutty, I know you; knew you the moment I clapped eyes on your wasted face. And you know me, too! Give another look, Nutty; you—who murdered my comrade, Willie Ogilvie, a poor harmless boy who never harmed you or any one else. You had no reason to give him the dog's life and the dog's death you did, Nutty. You was the devil in that hell of a hulk, and you murdered that boy, body and soul; and now you'll have a last chance to put a brushful of whitewash over yer conscience before ye go."

The passenger groaned in agony; the end was so close he could see the gates of the spirit-world gaping for him, and with a tremendous effort he raised himself again to take yet another look at his tormentor.

"For the love of God, mate, don't play crooked with a dying man," he gasped. "You've sworn on the holy book to see the old lady right, and you can't rob her, can you? In the name of all that's holy, who are you, and what do you want me to do?"

"Who am I?" bawled Donald above the roar of the storm. "Who am I, and what do I want you to do? Why, if I do that job for you, you above all men, I want my reward down here below. Money? No! I want none of your gold; your poor old mother can have all that, and much good may it do her. This'll bite you in a tender spot; I'm Archie Sloss, the man your mates were all hunting up and down the country for, and the chum of poor little Willie Ogilvie who you done to death."

The ex-warder groaned in extremity, and in rapidly weakening voice he said:

"Well, Sloss, I'm all in now, and you've got me to rights. I was hard in the hulk, but they were hard men I had to watch. Only do as you promised with the old lady and you can do just what you like with me now; it won't make a bit o' difference by this time tomorrow. What is it you want me to do?"

"Look here, Nutty, and listen. I'll take care of your money and deliver it to the old lady, on my oath as sworn on the book. You in return will take my name! What d'ye say? Quick!"

Nutty, almost at the last gasp, nodded.

"Oh! anything, anything; only let me get it done and go out in peace."

"Kiss the book on it, Nutty?"

Again Nutty nodded, this time more weakly.

"And you'll sign a paper before the cook?" pursued the inexorable Scot. "Yes, yes—give me the book."

"I'll go fetch the cook and he'll take your dying confession. Mind, you're that black-hearted villain, Archie Sloss, cattle-lifter, bushranger, escaped convict and desperado, and you put Nutty Armstrong out and took his place in this ship as a passenger."

Nutty nodded again. Though a glint came into his eyes at that last sentence. At that moment the storm stopped to gather breath, and in the lull the door opened and in rushed the cook, clad in gleaming oil-skins, with the water streaming from him.

"Cook," said Donald, "see here, he's croakin'. And who d'ye think he is?"

The cook spat out a mouthful of salt water with a curse and rummaged for his pipe, taking no notice of the question.

"Cook! Cook!" Donald gripped him by the neck in his anxiety to complete the last act while breath remained in Armstrong's body. "See, it's Archie Sloss we've had as a bunk-mate. You tell him," he roared at the fast-slipping Nutty.

Donald made a dive for the Bible; the deposition was written down on the back of the paper offering the reward for Sloss's capture, in the presence of the now awe-stricken cook, duly signed and witnessed in a shaking scrawl—and what a shipwreck of a scrawl that was!

But it was sufficient. Archie Sloss passed out.

He died at eight bells in the morning; at eight bells noon they sewed him up in a canvas sheet, duly weighted at foot. The storm had dropped to a sullen half-gale and the bark tumbled and rolled in the huge seas like a tub in a mill-race. The skipper, blear-eyed from want of sleep, muttering a

Digitized by Google

word or two from the sea burial service, cried, "Heave!" to the storm-fagged seamen, and overboard into the grim beyond dived the remains of Archie Sloss, convict and bushranger.

"Log it," tersely said the skipper to the mate.

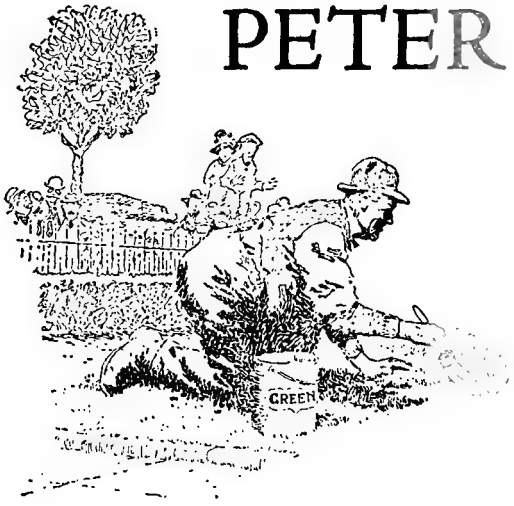
ONE night after the bark's arrival in port, Donald Macvittie—without his hump—appeared at the door of a small house on the outskirts of London, and knocked.

An old woman opened the door.

"I've a message from your son, missus, name of Armstrong," and he placed in her hands a canvas bag, heavy with metal. "Count it, Missus; there ought to be three hundred pounds."

And as he walked briskly away, his promise fulfilled, he muttered to himself:

"Willie Ogilvie, my boy, you're square all 'round with your murderer. And Archie Sloss, you old rascal, you're dead and buried; for I've seen in the papers the account of your funeral at sea!"



PETER KNOWLES RETIRES

By Clinton H. Stagg

EVERY time a baby was born into the world Old Peter Knowles scowled. Anybody who has ever read the statistics knows that a new child starts crying every second of the twenty-four hours. That's when Peter exhibited his grouch. Old Peter Knowles didn't like babies. They grew into men and women.

Peter Knowles made his first mistake when he had three husky sons. When his sons refused to profit by the errors of their parent and proceeded to sponsor three grandsons and four granddaughters, Peter took his grouch by the hand and led it around with him wherever he went. Peter also committed the tactical blunder of having money—he had oodles of money. Now money is all right—so are grandchildren—but they don't belong in the same family.

Every day that Peter went down to the Knowles Paint and Varnish Company's plant to mix up another batch of the stuff that smeared houses and barns from coast to coast he realized that purple and pink wouldn't blend worth a darn—it made a mess. When a man makes a mistake with a hundred gallons of paint he throws it out; when a man makes the mistake of having children who have children, the process is reversed.

The chief fault of Old Peter Knowles has been intimated. It is now told for the first time. He was old! This, of course, is bad enough, as any grandchild of a rich uncle knows. Furthermore he was active. There's the word that always makes trouble in this sad old spheroid! Old Peter was eighty and active. He dodged death every time a damp spell came on. He ducked the grim reaper every hay-fever

Digitized by Google

season. He skimmed the valley of the shadow every time a lazy householder refused to take five minutes from his morning paper to spread ashes on the front walk. Old Peter was not only active, he was agile.

Each morning at nine o'clock Peter was at his office. He sniffed at the sample of paint which was to decorate the trim of some business man's bungalow or color a plumber's garage. He scowled at the stock report. He snarled at the sales-sheet. He grunted at his stenographer because she said it was a nice morning. He swore at his grandsons and granddaughters because it was a habit. Then he was ready for the day's work.

"Sufferin' Hades an' purple paint!" swore Old Peter when his secretary came in and stood silently beside his employer's desk. "What's the idear of the long face? Can't you wiggle it an' kid it into a grin? Ain't there a laugh in this place? A man comes down to work expectin' to see a happy bunch, an' he finds a lot of pallbearers that look like they'd let the coffin slip on the last turn of the narrer stairs! Have I gotta look at grouches all my life?"

"No, sir," answered the secretary, who was within twenty thousand dollars and a four-carat diamond ring of marrying Florie, the little blonde granddaughter. "No, sir." His face tried to unfold itself into a smile. But it slipped. How could a man laugh when he had to think of adopting a grandfather who murdered the English language every time he opened his mouth? And Old Peter looked as strong as a horse! "No, sir," he said bravely.

"*Oof!*" yelled Peter Knowles. "No, sir! No, sir! No, sir! Goin' to be a waiter all your life?"

The secretary flushed. Florie Knowles had insisted on his carrying the plates of whipped-cream sandwiches at the last meeting of the Knowlton Ladies' Browning and Esthetic Thought Club. And Old Peter had heard of it. The secretary drew himself up haughtily.

"Here's another letter f m Vernon about that Murphy person," he announced gravely.

"All right! Eat it!" Old Peter jabbed his finger into a sample pot of blue paint and with professional eye watched it "hold."

"It's about his suit to recover that gold-bronze formula," explained the secretary patiently.

The old man ought to retire from business. It needed young blood. Twenty-seven was the right age for blood. The secretary would be twenty-eight his next birthday.

"Well?" bristled Peter. "Is that anything new? Ain't he been suin' for nineteen years?"

"The lower courts have sustained him again."

The secretary was very patient. After all, Peter Knowles was an old man.

"Say, are you tryin' to give me the doldrums?" challenged Old Peter. "Don't they always do that? That's what the lower courts are for! It's the higher courts where the business men gets a chance. Lower courts! Justice! Higher courts! Just-us!" He scowled fiercely and blackly at this.

Old Peter was always supremely pleased with himself when he worked a pun into his conversation.

The secretary laid on the desk the letter he had been holding in his carefully manicured hand.

"The lower court has also decided that Murphy is entitled to all the profits we have made on gold-bronze for the last nineteen years."

"Let's see that letter!"

Old Peter snatched it from the desk. He read it over carefully. The secretary stood behind him and made a mental inventory of the hairs on the back of Old Peter Knowles' head. There were twenty-one. It was tragic to think of a business like this in the hands of a senile old brain-cripple.

"Oof!" squealed Old Peter. "The aged idiot! He ought to be in a home, with a pet cat and a canary."

"Yes, sir!" exclaimed the secretary enthusiastically, before he thought.

Peter Knowles shot him a glance that always reminded the secretary of the Knowles No. 3 steel-finish varnish when it dried.

"An' he ought to have a nurse-maid with curly brown hair, brown eyes and a split chin!" grunted Peter, picking out every one of these secretarial characteristics. "What you botherin' me with this for?" he demanded, bristling. "Tell Vernon to enjoin him from receivin' any profits till the

Digitized by Google

decision is sustained by the higher courts. That'll keep the old fool from gettin' out an injunction to stop us makin' it. When you get that done, go out in the factory an' fall in the compound vat!"

"Yes, sir," promised the secretary dejectedly.

The old man was beginning to show the years. He must be humored. The secretary added a bit of conversation.

"The Star Paint Company got the contract for that Lawton City Brightening-up Week. Peter and Dave think they'll have to work the plant nights."

"What did they bid?" growled Old Peter.

"Sixty-three-four."

"Oof!" Peter Knowles' fingers tried to clutch at the twenty-one hairs and missed. "Young idiots! Couldn't paint the car-tracks with that!"

The secretary's eyes widened. That last was a foolish remark. Maybe the old duck *was* getting a bit off. He tried to be gentle.

"It might help them if you'd give a few tips," he suggested.

"No! Not! Never!" yelled Peter Knowles, jumping because the secretary had touched a ticklish spot. "I gave my sons that plant to run so they wouldn't bother me! I'm boss here, an' they can run their own business. All sons are idiots! Grandsons are damn' fools! Granddaughters——" He looked at his secretary and choked.

"They're getting more business than we are!" defended the secretary.

FLORIE and he had had quite an argument over that last night. It had ended by her declaration that he was a traitor and *wanted* to see her poor old grandfather run his business to rack and ruin, while her perfectly good father, and uncles, and cousins were unable to protect the family fortune. The secretary was ready to die with Florie's argument on his lips. She hadn't called him up once that morning and it was already ten-fifteen!

"They're getting more business than we are!" he repeated.

"So's the graveyards!" flared Old Peter. "Sixty-three-four! They ought to be sellin' picture-paints to children!" He shot out another of those No. 3 looks. "S'pose they're happy 'cause they beat out our seventy-two-one bid?" he snapped.

"They say your bid was foolishly high," flushed the secretary uncomfortably.

"Oh, they do?" asked Old Peter icily. "Maybe they said that just after you an' Florie talked it over!"

"I'll have you understand, Mr. Knowles——"

Peter interrupted him.

"Never mind that part! I didn't send that seventy-two-one bid you prepared. I sent one of my own. Sixty-eight-one! I know —— well a man can't mix family and business. That's why I put my fool sons in a plant of their own! Can't mix family an' business!" There was a glitter in his eyes. "I wouldn't have you around a minute if you had any brains!"

"No, sir!" gulped the secretary as he backed away. "No, sir!"

He didn't like the glitter in Peter's eye. It looked dangerous. And age was bringing the failing mentality at last! Peter had actually and solemnly accused him of not having brains! *Him!* He'd have to call up Florie. It would be a sad blow to the family. Perhaps, working together, they could still save the business.

"An'—" strangely enough Peter's voice, too, seemed to have that curious glittering quality—"an' if you want to hand over any more information 'bout my business, go to it!" He snorted his disgust. "If they got a little real information 'bout the paint business it'd rattle 'round in their head like a dried pea in a pod." He picked up the Murphy letter once more. "Don't forget that compound vat," he reminded, "an' close the door!"

"Yes, sir," murmured the secretary, determined to be conscientious and gentle until the last.

Old Peter Knowles read the letter over carefully. He swore. He read it again. This time he did not swear. He spread the four fingers on each hand to a fan-shape position and jabbed them all at the row of ivory buttons below the inkwells.

The stenographer hopped in first.

"Take lett'r, Vernon!" snapped Peter Knowles. "D'sir! Come 't once! Wanna-see you! ——fool Murphything! Say-'tonce'port'nt!"

He looked up into the faces of his shop-superintendent, his office-boy, his gold-bronze foreman, his head bookkeeper, his cost-clerk, his sales-manager, and his accountant. They had all obeyed the rubbing

Digitized by Google

of their master's lamp. He threw his orders into the crowd and let it scramble for them.

"Fin' out how much gold-bronze in stock! This letter special delivery right 'way! Get figures gold-bronze pr'duction last nineteen years! Fin' out fact'ry costs same time! How much gold-bronze we sellin'? Get profits last nineteen years! Hustle!"

His hard-working secretary came in to see what it was all about. He was rewarded for his alertness.

"Get out!" snapped Old Peter wrathfully. "You're fired! Beat it!"

THE Protective Order of Direct and Lineal Descendants of Old Peter Knowles had gathered in solemn conclave. Young Peter Knowles stared moodily at a pin on the rug. Its point was toward him. But its head was toward his married daughter. He hoped she'd have good luck. Her husband was on the trail of a big order for the Star Paint Company.

"It's terrible!" sobbed Florie as she discovered that in some mysterious way one of the secretary's fingers had managed to wiggle out of her hand.

"He is very old!" reminded Mrs. Joseph sadly.

"He ought to wake up and find it out, then!" declared her twenty-five-year-old son. "Eighty years old, a-trying to run a business!"

"It's a habit!" sighed David, fondly patting the arm of his wife.

"Then it's up to us to cure him!" decided David junior, who had landed the Lawton City contract.

"I heard of a man who was cured of the morphine habit by a camping trip in the mountains," suggested Mrs. John Knowles hopefully.

"He hasn't taken a vacation in twenty years," despaired Peter Knowles the second.

"No wonder he's run down," murmured Mrs. Peter.

"It's terrible!" sobbed Florie again. "I know he's lost all interest in his business. Hasn't he, George?" She squeezed all the fingers of his capable right hand.

George, the secretary with the curly brown hair and the cleft chin, shook his head sadly.

"His discharging me was a thunderclap," he declared. "Why," he resented, "he actually hinted at dishonesty! Of telling business secrets!"

"I wish he could understand that things were only being done for his own good," muttered young Peter. "But you can't talk to him!"

Silent head-shakes testified the truth of this sad fact. That was the whole trouble. Old Peter Knowles had reached the stage of senility where he refused to take the advice of his children and grandchildren. He actually seemed to believe that his doddering, eighty-year-old ideas could meet the modern competition of the younger generation! He was positively set on running his business headlong to destruction, while his children were forced to sit by helplessly. By Gosh, they wouldn't!

"He thinks every one's conspiring against him!" murmured Mrs. David junior with the air of one who is courageous enough to state the symptoms plainly.

"Don't!" shuddered Mrs. Peter third. "He doesn't even trust his own flesh and blood!"

"And he discharged George!" reminded Florie earnestly. He was her own grandfather, but she must face the truth.

George gave her fingers a reassuring pat. He was big and strong and willing to share the family sorrow.

"It's wicked to trust a business like that in his hands!" he averred. "He said paint the car-tracks! His eyes glittered! He didn't seem responsible!"

YOUNG Peter Knowles jumped, and used the jump to kick the point of the pin around so it indicated an unoccupied door.

"That's it!" he cried triumphantly.

"What?" chorused the P. O. of D. and L. D. of O. P. K.

Peter second was on his feet. He could talk better that way.

"Not responsible!" he repeated significantly. "That's the thing!"

"You don't mean——" gulped David the second, thinking of that seventy-two-one bid for the Lawton City contract.

A vigorous shake of Peter's head answered.

"Not that—yet," he hastened to put straight. "But he's old. He has reached the stage of incompetence. We, his children and his children's children, must protect

Digitized by Google

him from himself." He used a gesture that fitted in with the peroration of the speech he was to deliver at the Board of Trade banquet.

"He won't have to be—put away?" asked Mrs. Peter, looking admiringly at her husband. My, but that gesture was striking!

"No! Of course not!" Peter was almost impatient. "But the courts will help us before it is too late."

George rubbed his one usable hand through his curly brown hair.

"Mr. Knowles doesn't care anything about courts," he deplored. "He told me to eat that Murphy letter."

"That's a joke!" put in Joseph with a brave attempt to grin on this sad occasion. "That Murphy suit has been pending for nineteen years. He'll never recover."

"I don't know." George shook his head. "Mr. Knowles doesn't seem to consider details very much nowadays. I think he felt my attitude yesterday and he summoned several of the employees, evidently for a conference, then dismissed them when they had been there a minute. It wasn't longer than that, because I came right in. He had evidently forgotten what he wanted them for, and then vented his spite on me."

Peter the third was a whole lot like his father. He jumped.

"Jove!" he exclaimed. "That's true! You can't tell what might happen if some slick lawyer happened to get wise that granddad wasn't quite—up to snuff, and got a real judgment for this Murphy. And we could use granddad's compound mixer and grinder for this Lawton job pretty nicely about now."

"Yes!" put in John, who was a natural follower. "I don't believe in running that new machine of ours at night when we can't be there to watch it. I feel safer when one of us is around an expensive piece of machinery like that compound. I smelled liquor on the breath of one or two of that crew. With granddad's machine we could double up days!"

"We must hurry!" panted Mrs. David. "It would be a wonderful thing with the two plants combined. David could have his offices right in dad's factory. It would be *so* handy and near for his luncheons!"

"Judge Lowden's the man!" decided David. "He's looking for a Supreme Court term next administration, and our campaign contribution means a lot to the party."

"I don't understand," puzzled Florie. "Is granddad going to be arrested?"

"No," explained her father patiently. "But when a man gets so that his business becomes too much of a burden the courts decide that some competent person should run it for him."

"But wouldn't he be angry?" asked Mrs. David innocently. She never could follow the workings of her husband's wonderful mind. It made her actually dizzy!

"Doesn't a child cry when you take away the matches?" asked Peter third tolerantly.

DAVID hurried to the hall and the telephone. Silence came, but it was the relieved silence which follows the storm. The sun was just about to shine, the birds were preparing to carol their interrupted lays. The clouds were far down on the horizon. David put out his hand to pick up the telephone.

It jangled so sharply that he jumped. Every one else jumped, too. One's nerves did get unstrung after discussing so painful a family subject.

"Hello?" called David, and the chairs creaked as necks craned. "Oh yes, Cassidy. What's that? Oh Lord! All right. Let the men go home. We'll attend to it in the morning."

He turned away from the 'phone to meet Young Peter at the door.

"Plant on fire?" asked Peter quietly.

"Worse!" groaned David, "The compound has stripped everything. Cassidy says some one of the crew dropped a bottle into the gears."

"I felt that something would happen!" reminded John, with traces of pride for his own acumen.

David second choked back a swear word.

"That's what we were counting on to slide through that Lawton City job!" He made it an accusation to the world in general.

David the elder nodded glumly.

"We'll lose about four thousand dollars," he announced. "We can't do the job at our price without that machinery to make the cheap stuff mix together so it will hold its run."

George, who hadn't been able to move a fraction of an inch for twenty minutes,

Digitized by Google

now made Florie squeal as he straightened up.

"Mr. Knowles has a——"

He didn't finish. David's powerful right hand solar-plexused his wide left palm.

"We'll have to get that plant and dad's compound!" he ultimatumed. "We've got to finish that contract. With young ideas, new blood, and *our* methods we could make a trust of the Knowles name!" The dream brightened his eyes.

His son waked him.

"The paint's got to be delivered on the fifteenth to fill the order. We've got to get busy right away. It will take a week to get new gears. How long will it be before granddad can take that vacation he needs?"

"I'll get the judge!" David started to the telephone once more.

Silence fell again. The sun shot its first rays over the world. A bird lifted its voice in joyous song. The black clouds dropped over the horizon with a plunk.

The judge was at home. David spoke to His Honor kindly. He asked him to step over to the David Knowles home for a few minutes. His request was gentle but firm. Judge Lowden must not forget that it was David Knowles, of the younger Knowles, speaking. The younger Knowles, His Honor must recollect, were those progressive young men who contributed so liberally to the Republican Party each year. The judge did recollect. He would be right over.

The sun was really getting warm once more. The trees were filled with little birds. Clouds? What clouds?

"He's the man!" nodded David happily.

This Lawton City job would be a fine chance to show the superiority of modern ideas over archaic methods, he reflected. It was a shame his father had been allowed to wreck himself this way. But children and other cares did make sons neglectful of the parents to whom they owe so much.

"We can shave five per cent. off costs by buying in bulk for the two plants," declared Young Peter, who did the figuring for the concern.

"Poor granddad!" wept Florie, as she tried to get both of George's hands. "He can come and live with us, can't he, mamma? I'll be terribly kind to him."

"Yes, dear, he really should leave that big, old house," sighed her mother. Florie was so kind and thoughtful, and her eyes did match George's hair so prettily.

THE door-bell rang. It was the judge. He swished into the room. He had worn the judicial robes so long that he really had to swish. It was a habit. He greeted each one separately, a total of twelve greets. He was sorry that some of the younger married Knowles had left the home-nests. He looked very dignified when he bowed.

David came to the point at once. That was his business. He handled all the Star Paint Company's credit accounts. Carefully, crisply, tersely he went over each item in the account of age. He started with years, he added interest for maintenance, he compounded it with high-pressure wear and tear, he put in overhead charges. Then he exhibited the overwhelming total that represented the man who was trying to run the Knowles Paint and Varnish Company.

Judge Lowden listened carefully. As each item was recapitulated he put his gold-bowed glasses on the end of his nose. When that item was finished and the next ready for judicial survey he carefully took the gold-bowed glasses from the end of his nose. He did this because it is part of a judge's profession to put those glasses on and off between every telling point. A jurist's nose and eye-glasses answer exactly the same purpose as the little celluloid tabulator the baseball umpires use.

At the conclusion Judge Lowden looked up at the ceiling for his answer. In the old days inspired decisions were always slapped on the walls haphazard. In these modern days of judicial progress they are carefully placed on the ceiling above spectators' heads, so that the judge can look them over without being interrupted. The judge shook his head gravely, then he spoke.

"Nope!" he verdicted. "Nope! It can't be done."

The shock stunned every one but David.

"What?" he demanded. "Wouldn't any court in the land hold a man incompetent on that evidence?"

"Never!" The judge made it plain that the Court of Appeals had thrown up its hands and quit when he stepped into the case. "The law would not consider that just and sufficient evidence to give a proper verdict. He has done nothing so foolish that he could be held as insanely incompetent." The Protective Order winced, but recovered bravely. "He has only shown evidence of super-senility. While

Digitized by Google

it is, of course, more than sufficient to convince any one morally, it would not hold legally. The court requires some specific action showing the unimpeachable fact of —queerness!"

"Isn't there any justice in this country?" asked Young Peter wrathfully.

"Justice?" choked the experienced jurist. "Justice!" He forgot the ladies. "——, no! The courts won't declare a Democrat incompetent!"

III

OLD Peter Knowles' desk was a reviewing-stand and the parade was passing. The shop-superintendent laid a slip on the desk that gave the amount of gold-bronze in stock. He hurried out silently. The office-boy laid a telegram on the desk and Old Peter ripped it open. He snarled at it, then threw it on the floor. His head bookkeeper presented a neat array of figures which gave his employer the gold-bronze production for two decades.

The old bookkeeper always did his work well. He shuffled out slowly. The cost-clerk didn't even hesitate. He dropped his report at Old Peter's elbow and scurried out. The sales-manager remarked that gold-bronze was selling, and he was asked what in —— he supposed they were making it for. The accountant ran in on his toes, took a deep breath, laid down his sheet gently, and got out ahead of the slow-moving sales-manager, whose specialty was banquets.

Old Peter Knowles picked up the last report and snarled because the door slammed. He read the items. The date of the first was 1895. And the grand total of nineteen years' profit on gold-bronze made Peter's eyes widen.

"One million one hundred and thirteen thousand six hundred and two dollars and eight cents!"

He jammed down a button.

The summoned accountant looked scared, but he ran to the desk bravely and waited on his toes.

"What's this eight cents for?" demanded Old Peter.

He had always resented his accountant. The man who figured his profits was eighty-one and had never had a wife!

"It was an overcharge made in 1897 to Joshua Bate of Clay Center, Vermont. He was credited with it, but he died in 1898, and his heirs——"

"'Nough!" cut in Old Peter. "Take the day off and get married!"

"Yes, sir," untruthfully promised the accountant. That was always his dismissal and answer.

Peter leaned over and picked up the telegram he had flung on the floor. He jammed another button. The stenographer answered.

"When Vernon comes send him right in!" he ordered. "Wire says he'll be here 'leven."

"Yes sir," very meekly.

She glanced sadly at the door. David Knowles was hurrying in. It was terrible that Peter would not let his sons help him.

"Hello, dad!" smiled David, thrusting out his hand. His voice lowered to seriousness and the smile became a look of kindly commiseration. "How do you feel this morning?"

OLD Peter Knowles ripped up the telegram and report. He dropped them to the floor and kicked at the place where they fell. A growl started in his throat, then he realized that after all this was his son and should be made happy.

"I feel rotten!" he growled. "I'm dyin'! Think I've got a leakin' heart! Bothers me here!" He tenderly touched the spot where his liver should be. "Gettin' a touch of the asthma, too!" he wheezed. "An' these wind-bags of mine feel like they was achin' for a siege of pneumonia. How're you?"

"That's too bad," pitied David with a break in his voice.

A glitter came to the eyes of old Peter.

"Seen that fool secretary of mine hangin' 'round your place?" he grunted.

"Yes." Surprise was in David's voice. "He said that you had discharged him."

The growl which Old Peter had been holding back now burst forth in mighty volume.

"So I did!" he yelled. "But is that any excuse for him stayin' away from here when there's work to be done?"

"There! There!" soothed David. "I'll tell him. Does your head feel badly?"

Peter Knowles didn't answer. His Adam's apple choked him. He rose from his chair and walked around the office. His hands were clasped behind his back and his lips twitched.

Digitized by Google

"Is it in the back of your head?" whispered David, coming close and putting a protecting arm over his father's shoulder.

"No," Old Peter answered slowly, very slowly. He sat down. "No. It's something in the front of my head—where my eyes are." The safety-valve popped then. "What do you want 'round here this time o' day?" he snapped. "Do you need somebody with brains to run that Star company? I can't! I'm busy!"

David backed away, and the look of sadness deepened. His father imagined that *he* could handle the affairs of the Star company. Hallucinations! That's the stage his poor old dad had reached.

"No," he said softly, with a shake of his head. He might as well get right down to business. He couldn't bear to stay and see the ravages of hard work and age on the human brain. "Will you do a job for us at cost? Our compound broke last night. It's a rush job."

Old Peter's eye-glitter became a gleam.

"Sure," he answered, "don't I always do that?"

"It's that Lawton City order," explained David, and he uttered a silent sigh of relief. His father was rational once more. "What would be your cost price on that?"

Old Peter swung around toward his desk. "Sixty-three-four," he answered.

"Why?" gasped his son. "That's our bid! Where's the profit?"

"D'ference between sixty-three-four an' sixty-eight-one. That's what I bid."

"But—but—" stammered the hurt and amazed son, the look of commiseration and pity coming back—"I don't think you're well this morning, dad."

"*Oof!*" Old Peter bounded out of his chair. Every one of his twenty-one white hairs crackled. "I ain't!" he snarled. "I'm dyin'! Get out of my office with your muddy shoes! I want a clean floor when I flop!"

David shook his head. Then he went out slowly. The family must be summoned.

Old Peter snorted and fumbled around his desk. Then he looked down at the floor where lay the torn pieces of the telegram and the accountant's report. He pushed down a button and the accountant again tiptoed in.

"What was them figgers?" asked Old Peter. "That son of mine made me tear 'em up. Somebody's allus gettin' me mad!" he complained.

The accountant repeated the figures slowly. He would be able to do that for at least five years. But longer than that he would probably have to refer to his books. His memory was going back on him.

"Aw right!" growled Peter. Then he looked up. "Am I crazy?" he demanded.

"No, sir!" faltered the accountant, frightened because his heels had touched the floor. "Why?" he stammered.

"Because I got a bunch of damn' fool sons. I thought maybe they caught it from me."

"Yes, sir." The accountant teetered softly out.

Old Peter pulled over pen and paper. He figured. His face grew purple. His breath wheezed. His clutching fingers subtracted a hair from the twenty-one, leaving a sum total of twenty.

A jab of his finger brought the stenographer.

"Send Vernon in soon's he comes. When my other sons get here chloroform 'em. They'll be here soon. They always parade in a row times like this."

"Yes, Mister Knowles," sighed the stenographer. It was awful when a family was es—estranged like that.

THE dove of peace hovered over the Knowles Paint and Varnish Company and cooed happily. Then Young Peter Knowles came to shoo it away. He entered the president's office slowly, with his hat in his hand.

"I'd like to talk to you, dad," he said sadly, as his fingers gripped his father's hand with much fondness.

"Why d'n't you use the telephone, then?" bristled old Peter.

"You're tired, pop," discovered Young Peter. "Why don't you take a good, long rest? We'll take care of your business for you. You've worked long enough. It hurts us to see you wearing yourself out this way. And the strain——"

"My price is sixty-three-four!" snapped Old Peter. "Not a cent less. You run your own plant! I'll kid mine along!"

"I wasn't thinking of that, pop!" protested his injured son. "It's *you!* The wear is telling! I can see it! I can see——"

"You drink too much!" accused Old Peter. "You'll be seein' purple lizards next!"

Young Peter winced. His father's eyes glittered.

Digitized by Google

"Others can see that you need a rest," he went on bravely.

"I know it!" Old Peter positively cackled. "When does that Lawton City job have to be done?"

Young Peter put his hat on his head, then he shook it slowly.

"We won't talk business this morning," he decided. "I don't think you're responsible."

His father had cackled, actually cackled!

"Shut the door," invited Old Peter.

The door closed softly. Peter Knowles picked up his pen and threw it at the wall. He raised his arms above his head and jerked a horrid curse from the air.

"Not responsible!" he gritted. "Not—not—I'll be incompetent next!" The gleam in his eyes really threatened to singe his white eyebrows. "They'll get the courts to say I'm crazy, soon!"

He picked up another pen and stabbed the sales-manager's button. It was answered without delay

"Push gold-bronze!" ordered Peter. "Shop's makin' ten thousand pounds. I'll make you eat all you don't sell."

"Right, sir," smiled the much banqueted sales-manager. *He* was very competent.

The dove of peace settled on the ground. Then John came and stepped on its tail.

"Good morning, father," he greeted slowly. John had always been ashamed of the fact that he was afraid of his father.

Peter impaled him on a pair of gleaming eyes.

"The price is sixty-three-four! I know I'm worn out! I'm gone! I'm nutty! I'm a fool! But I'm an old fool, and I'll stay the way I am. I ain't a young fool that'd go right on gettin' worse all the time! I'm boss here! I'll run this plant till I start runnin' a harp school on South Main Street, Heaven. That's all! Good-by! You'll find the door right where you left it!"

"Why—why——" started John, but he was nearer the door than he had been.

Peter leaped from his chair.

"How the devil do I know *why?*" he snarled. "I'm just this way nacherally. Beat it! Get out! It'll take more'n a couple of fool sons to tell me I can't run this business. It'll take the United States Supreme Court!"

John's mouth opened. He closed it again. His father was *violent.*

"I suppose that'll be next!" declared the old man wrathfully. "The courts!" His eyes stabbed at John.

"Yes, sir," stuttered John.

"*Oof!*" screeched the father of three sons. "Get out before——"

John was forced to step aside for the little stenographer. She gave him a glance of pity as he backed out and bowed. She came over to the desk.

"Mr. Vernon," she announced softly.

Old Peter swallowed his palate. She knew this because it choked him.

Then he spoke very slowly and his words hurt him.

" 'Scuse me! I tol' you to send him right in. Oughta tol' you to keep him settin' out there a couple of hours, hadn't I? That's what I meant!"

"Yes, sir," she gulped fleeing. Oh, it was sad, sad!

AS THE lawyer entered, Old Peter picked up the paper and the figures he had made. He glared at Vernon. "What in ——'s this?" he demanded, as he dragged the Murphy letter from a pile of papers and shook it angrily.

"It means that he's got us. He's clamped everything down tight." Vernon spread out his empty hands.

"The higher courts'll throw it out!" flared Old Peter.

"No they won't," denied the lawyer. "They'll sustain every point. It was only a question of a good lawyer. Murphy finally got one. He didn't leave a loophole!"

Old Peter Knowles threw up his hands.

"What's this country comin' to," he demanded, "when a man that didn't do nothin' but invent a gold-bronze formula can take money outta the pockets of an honest manufacturer that's been makin' it for nineteen years?"

Vernon put his glasses on the end of his nose and took them off. He had been a judge before the newspapers took his job.

"Murphy won't compromise for a cent less than full profits," he declared. "The fight in the Supreme Court will be merely a formality."

The head of the Knowles Paint and Varnish Company was on his feet. He walked around the office telling himself things that shocked even the lawyer whose specialty as a judge had been divorce cases.

Digitized by Google

"Do you know how them profits run?" he finally belched. "Do you know it means I gotta pay that mush-head one million one hundred and thirteen thousand, six hundred an' two dollars an' eight cents?"

"Whew!" whistled the lawyer. "Whew!"

"Stop whewin'!" ordered Old Peter petulantly. "I won't pay it!" he yelled. "I never paid for nothin' I stole before, an' I'm too damn' ol' to start now!"

Vernon said nothing. He didn't have to. His hands were talking. They were moving in wide, helpless gestures.

"You're a —— of a lawyer!" snarled Peter. "Nineteen years on a case an' don't know 'nough about it to keep a man from collectin' over a million dollars!"

"There isn't any way," declared the lawyer firmly. "It's an open-and-shut case. He can tie up your plant, cover it with liens, and I don't doubt that he can mandamus your sons' books to show profits in gold-bronze during the early years they did subcontract work for this plant!"

"*Oof!*" screamed Old Peter, and his eyes shot fire. "Get out! Send in your bill! I wanta make you sue for it!"

Vernon rose stiffly. His hands talked as they jammed his hat down over his ears.

"Good day," he added as an afterthought.

Peter Knowles walked up and down his office ninety-seven times. His lips were still working and his fingers were knotting behind his back. His face was a bright purplish tinge and his twenty white hairs crackled. One million one hundred and thirteen thousand, six hundred and two dollars and eight cents!

Curly-haired George, the secretary, stopped at the door.

"You don't feel well, Mr. Knowles!" he gasped and he spread his strong arms to catch his employer as he fell.

Peter glared at him. Then he whirled around and his fingers knotted together. He choked and pulled them apart. Then he faced George.

"I'll be all right!" he muttered. "Time you got to work. Go down to the shippin'-room an' get me a two-gallon can of No. 16 an' a four-an'-a-half-inch brush. Tell Dan to wrap 'em up so's I can take 'em home."

"Certainly," murmured the secretary softly.

The old man was even worse than David had said. He hurried on his errand.

PETER KNOWLES put on his hat and coat. He carefully brushed both for the first time in two years. The stenographer heard the strange sounds and came to the door. She hopped away. She wanted to be near a 'phone.

George almost dropped his packages when he came back. But Peter saved them by snatching them from his secretary's hands.

"Gonna take a day off!" he snapped. "I'm tired. Workin' too damn' hard!"

"That's fine!" agreed the secretary enthusiastically. "You—do need a rest."

"R-r-r-r-r!" growled Peter, and he slammed the office door so hard it made the contents of No. 6 vat spill on the foreman's leg.

The curly-haired secretary sat down at his employer's desk. He was fervently thankful that at last Old Peter Knowles was coming to realize that he was getting old, and that young blood was the thing.

George called up Florie. He talked with her for twenty minutes, using thirty valuable seconds to tell her that her grandfather had quit work in the middle of the day for the first time in forty-one years. The figures were Old Peter's own. Then George called up David, and Young Peter, and John. Their poor father was in very bad shape, and would he start work on the Lawton City job at once?

The noon whistle blew, and George was conscientiously working. Ten minutes later Florie, white-faced and frightened, burst into the office.

"Oh, George!" she sobbed. "George! Something dreadful's happened to granddad! Aunt Josie telephoned that the grocer-boy told her a big crowd had gathered in front of his house! Mamma is away, and won't you go down there with me and see if we can do anything? I know it's something terrible. Aunt Josie thinks he's dropped dead in the front yard or something. Oh, I'm so frightened. Poor old granddad! He was so *sweet!* It won't make any difference to our wedding, will it, dear?"

George was jerking on his hat and coat.

"Did you come in the runabout?" he asked as he hurried her out.

"Yes," she managed to gasp as he lifted her into the car. George was so masterful it took one's breath away.

Down the main street of Knowlton they

Digitized by Google

sped, dodging among workmen enjoying their noon hour. At the end of the street Old Peter's house set back from the road and he lived alone. There was a crowd! A huge crowd that lined the fences and extended into the street. Florie clutched at his arm and he nearly injured a valuable workman. He stopped the car and they stood up so they could see over the heads of the gathered throng.

Aunt Josie had been mistaken. There was nothing the matter with Peter. Quite the contrary. He was enjoying the best of health. A happy smile wreathed his wrinkled old face. By his knees was an open two-gallon can. In his right hand was a brush. No, there was nothing wrong with Old Peter Knowles. He was painting the neatly clipped grass of his front lawn a bright, vivid green!

IV

THE Protective Order of Direct and Lineal Descendants of Old Peter Knowles was divided into two battalions: smelling-salts and service. The blow had fallen! The crisis had come. The sons were on the service-line battling valiantly. Peter the second lifted the ice from his highball-glass. It hurt his teeth when he drank.

"You spoke to him, David?" he asked softly.

David nodded. He had formed the scout corps. "Yes," he answered glumly.

"He said—" choked John— "he said——"

"That he wanted to prove he was big enough —— fool to be our father," groaned David.

"Doctor Langdon said it was the snapping of the thread," sighed John.

"And this Lawton City job, too!" groaned David. He looked at his watch and swore. "Why doesn't the Judge hurry?" he demanded of his highball-glass.

"He said he'd be here with the injunction at two-thirty," reminded Young Peter uselessly.

He ordered another highball. That Board of Trade dinner was only two weeks off. And his speech was: "Sanity in Business!"

The club page approached the group with proper funereal mien.

"Mr. David Knowles for the telephone, sir."

David hurried away gloomily. He came back and slumped into his chair.

"Little Florie tried to reason with him. She's home crying her eyes out."

"Is he still—still——" choked John.

"Yes," nodded David, chewing at the rim of his highball-glass. "He's got five little girls with pink aprons spreading newspapers over the grass to keep the birds off the fresh paint. He's hired 'em by the week."

Young Peter spluttered his rage.

"And there are people depraved enough to take advantage of—of—queerness!"

Nods answered. Horrible! Hideous!

David snapped out his watch again.

"Darn that judge!" he swore. "Every minute's valuable. There's not a chance of getting an extension on that Lawton City job."

"Ah!" murmured the sharp-eared John. "He's coming. He always knocks against that big plaque we gave the club."

The service battalion perked up. Judge Lowden swished in.

"All right?" demanded Young Peter.

"Whisky," ordered the judge of the man who placed his chair.

Then he nodded and handed over a paper. Three heads came together. The judge watched the serving-man thirstily. The sons read the order. It enjoined Peter Knowles senior from manufacturing, producing, selling, offering for sale, disposing of, or bartering any products compounded, made, mixed, put together in his factory, shop, industrial plant, or place of business until he had answered the court-order to show cause why he should not be adjudged incompetent to hold, convey, maintain, transfer, assign, or give gratuitously any shares, stocks, parts, or parcels of interests, holdings, or liens in the Knowles Paint and Varnish Company. The order was quite complete.

"When is the hearing set?" asked David, nodding his approval.

All that remained now was the legal transfer of the business, and their poor old father could take the rest he needed.

Judge Lowden drank his whisky. Then he looked up at the ceiling.

"An order like that is returnable in ten days," he verdicted. "To give the enjoined a chance to prepare defense."

"Defense!" gasped the younger Knowles in chorus. Then Young Peter took up the

Digitized by Google

verse. "We can't wait! I understood there would be no delay!" He glared at Judge Lowden.

That well-known member of the State bar gazed at the ceiling reflectively.

"Dan Sweeny ran his three-thousand-dollar car into a trolley-pole last night," he remarked idly. "Made scrap of it."

The younger Knowles also looked up at the ceiling. They'd never understood before how much was up there to see.

Young Peter swallowed at something in his throat.

"I know a man who's got a new car that he'd practically give away," he remembered suddenly. Pretty howdy-do when the political boss of the State went around hitting trolley-poles with his automobile!

Judge Lowden found a place on the ceiling that the others hadn't seen.

"He was telling me last night he thought of getting one of those five-thousand-dollar boys with electrical equipment."

"All right!" blurted David, and the hand that held the court-order trembled. Graft! His soul revolted! But the business his father had taken so much pride in building must be saved. Lack of worry and care would soon give his poor old dad back his mental health.

Judge Lowden rose. The worst of these clubs was that nobody ever seemed to be dry.

"Dave has a case on the calendar for ten in the morning," he observed, "but he'll be busy trying out his car. I'll see you then."

Six silent nods answered him.

"We'd better go home," sighed John. "My wife is prostrated."

"So's mine," said six other sighs. "Tomorrow at ten."

THE service ranks went to the reinforcement of the smelling-salts brigade. Only George, the curly-haired secretary, was on the firing-line. Young blood was flowing through the veins of the Knowles Paint and Varnish Company, purging, revivifying the industrial body of that once great concern. Young blood was a wonderful thing. Already three shop-foremen, nineteen workmen, and the superintendent had quit. It was three-thirty in the afternoon. George hadn't had time to attend to details that would bring him in touch with every department.

Then George got a telephone message from Florie and threw up his hands. How could a man think of work when the most wonderful girl in the world needed comfort and help? He put the little stenographer in charge of the plant and left it flat.

He had to go past the Old Peter Knowles home and he shuddered as he saw the little girls blithely spreading newspapers over the newly painted grass. Then he stared. Yes, it was true! Three shop-foremen, nineteen workmen, and the superintendent were helping Old Peter Knowles paint. George stopped. After all, Peter was still morally his employer.

"Those men resigned this afternoon," he informed, as Peter with a green-smudged face straightened up to smile at him. Smile!

"Yes," chortled Old Peter happily. "They said they couldn't work for a crazy fool."

George shuddered again. My, but it was pathetic! He found Florie with the smelling-salts brigade. The service reinforcements had braced it so that it was almost able to sit up and sip weak tea. It was a very sad evening. Mrs. Peter second talked to Mrs. David first over the phone in choked whispers and complained three times to the manager that the service was intolerable. Mrs. John held her husband's hand and shivered. Did people wear black at times like these?

Morning came. Everything was light but the hearts of the younger Knowles. David, John, and Young Peter arrived at the club within a minute of each other. It was nine-forty-five.

"Does—father know?" asked John, patting his black tie. Mrs. John had insisted on that.

"Yes," nodded David. "He got a copy of the order. No doubt he'll be there."

"Good," said Young Peter softly. "It'll be easier, then."

David took out his watch.

"Marcus should be here," he complained.

"He's the best lawyer in the county," declared John. "Ah, here he comes."

They greeted the portly man gravely.

"I just saw your father on his way to the court," he gossiped. "He had counsel."

"What?" chorused the three sons.

"Vernon?" scowled David.

The lawyer shook his head.

"No. Some stranger from a small town in the western part of the State, I believe."

Digitized by Google

He patted his vest complacently. "Your father introduced me. Name was O'Connell, if I recollect. He'd just finished a case for some Irishman. Murder, I suppose."

"There won't be—trouble?" stammered John, wondering why his chin wobbled.

The complacent smile deepened.

"I have one hundred and three affidavits of townspeople who saw your father yesterday!" he announced. "There will be no trouble."

The astute lawyer was right. When they filed solemnly into the court-room their father was at his counsel's table. He did not look up as they entered. He was too busy. He was winding pink, red, and yellow worsted around a long stick which had been painted with Knowles No. 16 green paint.

"He says he's goin' to stripe the lawn when he gets the right color-combination," enlightened a spectator hoarsely.

JUDGE LOWDEN swished to the bench. He did not look at the younger Knowles. He did not know them. He saw that the ceiling was clean and ready for the day's work. Then his gavel opened the halls of justice. There was no delay. His honor had an invitation to help pick out that five-thousand-dollar car at eleven.

The order was read. Old Peter bit a piece of pink worsted from a ball he took out of his pocket. The affidavits were introduced. His honor mildly requested whether there was any intention to show cause why the court-order should not be made permanent and Old Peter Knowles adjudged incompetent. Judge Lowden scowled blackly at the strange lawyer. What did a poor hick from some jay town want to clutter up his court-room for?

Old Peter Knowles looked up. He smiled at all the world. He nodded. His lawyer rose and began speaking in a low, solemn voice that told he, too, felt the tragedy into which he had been drawn.

"My client realizes that he has passed the age of activity," he said slowly. "He understands that younger blood, keener minds are necessary to meet advanced competition." The younger Knowles straightened up. Their father had had a lucid moment. "He is willing that the Knowles Paint and Varnish Company be absolutely taken off his hands. But—" the lawyer's voice became even more solemn—"he has a horror of penniless, dependent old age."

The sons looked shocked. Their father penniless and dependent!

"He has given years to the building of his business. The Knowles Paint and Varnish Company is among the biggest in the world. While my client understands and appreciates the fact that his beloved sons will conduct affairs properly and more efficiently than could he, nevertheless he has been a business man so long that the formality of business procedure has been ingrained and inborn."

The sons nodded. Their father could have anything within reason. It wasn't the money they desired. It was the family name! The family business that must be protected!

"Mr. Knowles' desire is this—" the lawyer looked hopefully toward the sons: "He wants one million dollars' worth of stock in the new company, to be protected and guaranteed from all future assessments of any kind. He wants it guaranteed by the present Star Paint Company until the new combined company can legally come into being."

The sons were buzzing. One million in stock! What did an old man want with all that money? It was too much!

"Unless this can be arranged immediately I will put the matter up to the Supreme Court, getting a stay of twenty days. His Honor knows that such a stay can not be refused in a case of this kind."

The sons stopped buzzing. Twenty days! The Knowles plant, as it stood, was worth a million and three-quarters. A million in stock still meant three-quarters of a million clear, and with increased efficiency the dream of a Knowles paint trust would come true. The Star plant was valued at a million. It would be worth five in a few years. And it wasn't the money they wanted. It was mental health for their father. He would not live long. The million would be out of their hands but a short time. Young Peter nodded, and he looked at his father fondly, kindly.

Their lawyer rose. The sons had agreed. They would give their father anything he wanted. It could be fixed right away. It was. Judge Lowden was getting impatient. His watch said ten-thirty-five. Old Peter Knowles industriously wound his pink yarn.

Digitized by Google

That looked better than anything else against the green. At ten-fifty his lawyer tapped his shoulder and he arose and followed his counsel from the room.

His sons sighed as they watched him. David spoke.

"I'll hustle right down to the new plant and get a line on things. We'll have the two running together like a clock within a week."

HE HURRIED to his waiting car. He hurried to the office of the Knowles Paint and Varnish Company. *His* office! It would be very handy for lunch.

"Mr. Vernon is waiting," announced the little stenographer. It was so good that old Mr. Knowles was going to take the rest he needed.

"Vernon?" questioned David vaguely.

Then he recollected. Oh, yes, the lawyer who had handled the Murphy thing for nineteen years. They'd have to get some young blood in the legal department hereafter.

"Send him in," he ordered.

Vernon came. He lost no time.

"Carrying that case to the Supreme Court is a waste of time and money!" he declared. "Murphy has the judgment, and the liens will be slapped on today!"

"Judgment! Liens?" gasped David, and he suddenly felt sick.

"Yes! That gold-bronze thing. He's collecting $1,113,602.08! Your father knows all about it. There's no chance of beating it!"

"Against this plant?" gulped David. Why didn't the world stand still? It wasn't a merry-go-round!

"Yes! I told him he was foolish to spend any more! Good day!"

He hurried out. David dropped in a chair. Then he jumped up. There must be some mistake. His finger poised over George's button. No! He would get his father to tell him that the thing was false. He ran from the office. His car was ready. Peter Knowles' home was three minutes away.

Old Peter Knowles came to meet his son.

"Vernon says Murphy got a judgment for over a million that can't be set aside!" he blurted.

"Yes," smiled his father, brushing his hand across his eyes. "But I guess it'll be more'n that.. The shop's got orders to rush gold-bronze, an' the sales department's pushin' it. I was real crazy, I guess."

"But that means, with your million, that we'll have to dig down in our pockets for more than three hundred thousand dollars to clear things!" exclaimed David. "Unless——"

"Mine's guaranteed by the Star Company," scowled his father. "I ain't got nothin' to do with that old plant. My guarantee's non-assess'ble an' free from all liens. That's fixed!"

"But that million is the entire value of the Star Company!" choked the son.

"Yes." Old Peter looked with a critical eye over the smooth white newspapers. "It seems like we'll have to trade plants. You got mine, and it looks like I'll have to protect that guarantee of mine. I thought maybe I would. That's the reason my lawyer fixed it that way."

"It won't hold!" flamed the son, forgetting that he was speaking to his poor old father.

"Won't it?" belched Old Peter, forgetting that he was incompetent. "You pry it loose, then! That O'Connell was *Murphy's* lawyer. I wired him last night as soon's I saw what was goin' on! He's a wonder for clampin' things tight!" Then a happy, peaceful smile came to light up his wrinkled old face with its glow of childish simplicity. He leaned over and tenderly lifted the corner of a newspaper. "Ain't the grass a pretty green?" he murmured softly. "It'll be dry soon."

Digitized by Google

SNAP-SHOTTING WAR WITH JIMMY HARE

Some Cuban and Manchurian Experiences with the man who furnishes many of the exciting Photographs you see in the public print

By
Robert Welles Ritchie
Author of "That Little Guy of Peter-Paul."

IT WAS a morning in balmy February. Santiago de Cuba lay an hour behind, and every turn of the screw brought out sharper against the hard blue of the sky the piled-up masses of bald scarp and pinnacle back of Siboney. Hare—Jimmy Hare, the Bayard of the camera, who goes a-venturing with a black box wherever there is a big noise in the world—was one of a group on the shaded boat-deck. His eyes were avid for every turn of a hill-top, each scraggling palm landmarking the sky. He had listened respectfully to the end while the man from Akron told all about the battle that had been fought over there in those tawny hills on two scorching days of July, 1898; but he was telling the tale as he had read it. His name was Tomlinson.

"Right over that patch of green back of the mines you can see through the glass," Hare then said, "I nearly starved to death while I was taking my first photographs under fire. And you'd better believe it was touch and go with me whether I would drop first from hunger or shrapnel."

The remark was casual; its reception electric. One urged a story, for it had been bruited about that this little man in the wrinkled khaki suit who had boarded the boat at Colon, after trying to take pictures of the Big Ditch from an aeroplane, had stories to tell if overtures were made. Hare demurred at first with proper modesty; he tugged at his scraggy red-gray beard, pulled his nose, settled his cap over his eyes and then began in his quick-chopped Cockney speech to tell something of his experiences in snapshotting history, white-hot on the battle-field.

In the telling he jumped from Santiago to Chong-ju, in Manchuria, dealt in terror and comedy, the dramatic and the commonplace. He spoke impersonally of incidents in his craft pursuit with an egotism naively detached. He made the genius of adventure, which for fourteen years had been ever at his elbow, an intimate and a personable being.

"You see, I had never taken pictures of a battle before that one at Santiago," was Hare's simple introduction. "I had never

Digitized by Google

even done a campaign, and of course there was a great deal I had to learn. For one thing, how to take care of myself in the field; how to feed myself; how to get over the ground and get my pictures from the front in the quickest possible time.

"Oh, yes—" and Hare chuckled in his beard—"and how to act under fire. That was another bit I had to add to my store of information. By the time I was taking snapshots of shells exploding on the battle-field at Chong-ju I had more or less come to know how a shrapnel-shot whinnies. But, oh, how green I was at Santiago! A poor waif—an outcast with an eight-by-ten camera and a simple faith in my eternal luck—that's what I was when I was dumped on the beach at Siboney on June thirtieth.

"No outfit except my plates and films; no blankets; no food; no knowledge of anybody or anything of existing conditions. I was just kicked around in all the lather of confusion there at the supply-depot like any orphan. Back there at Key West, you see, they had told me that all I would have to do when I got to Siboney would be to attach myself to one of the regiments and mess with the officers; I had letters from Washington and all that sort of thing.

"But one look at that wharf at Siboney, and all the cursing and tangled commissary officers, had been enough to tell me that 'attaching myself' would be as easy as taking Santiago from the Spaniards in my pajamas. It was Sylvester Scovel, of the New York *World* staff, who got me my first meal; but where would the next one come from?"

Hare graphically peopled the yellow beach that we could dimly see over there beyond the white surf-line where the mountains came tumbling down to the sea, with the creatures of Gehenna—all of the madness and confusion and uproar of an invading army's base when the commissariat can not find itself.

"We left it all, Stephen Crane and I, to walk the ten miles to where Capron's battery was posted at El Caney. It was night. It was hot. The roads were ghastly. We walked—we almost ran—because Scovel had whispered mysteriously in our ears back there at Siboney that a big battle would begin with Capron's guns opening on the Spaniards' entrenchments at five o'clock in the morning. And we didn't want to miss that. Oh, no; we certainly didn't want to miss that!

"But just one little meal that day for James H. Hare."

Just one meal, and they quarreled like children in the night hours of that tramp. Hare admitted it himself.

He told how he and the brilliant man, whose "Wounds in the Rain" was even then storing itself for the writing, bickered and grumbled during the whole black ten miles, startled by the land-crabs, likely to be bowled over by a Spanish sharpshooter's or an American picket's bullet. Then Crane's tent, a fumbling lunch on crackers in the dark, and finally the drenching sleep of exhaustion.

"I don't recall that I was particularly excited when I woke at four o'clock on the morning of July 1st; at least, not excited because there was going to be a big fight. I was just mortally afraid that it might all happen so quickly that I would not be there to get some pictures. It was the worst fear a conscientious man can know, I guess—the fear of falling down on the job. I just said to myself, 'Now, Hare, old boy, busy! Busy!'

"Of course I didn't stop to cook any of Crane's food—Crane himself positively refused to get up when I did—I was so terrified for fear that something big would happen and Jimmy Hare wouldn't be there with his camera to get it that I set out, hungry, in the first streak of dawn and began to feel my way along boggy roads and across the San Juan River for Capron's Battery. Somebody told me Grimes's Battery at El Poso, which was nearer than Capron's position, would open first. So I rushed here and there through the dawn, asking everybody I could stop where the battery was, but finding out nothing at all from any one.

"Finally I stumbled on to the limbers, down in a little swale where a straw-thatched sugar-mill stood.

That minute from the crest of the hill beyond, all pale and filmy-shaped in the dawn-light, came the heavy crack of a gun. A white mushroom of powder-smoke, like a balloon inflating, rose slowly up in the face of the new day.

" 'Jimmy,' I whispered to myself as I plunged up the hill toward that smoke-cloud, 'you're here; you're going to get those pictures. By ——, you're going to get those pictures!'

Digitized by Google

FIRST PICTURES UNDER FIRE

"UP TO the crest of the hill; and there were Grimes's six guns, all in a semicircle, and over beyond the little valley more hills, with the red roofs of Santiago showing just above their tops, and little dots of blockhouses scattered here and there along the sky-line. Another of the guns was fired; once more the cloud of white smoke from the black powder, marking the position of the battery to all the world.

"I unlimbered my camera and made a snap before the puff of the shell's explosion over the Spanish trenches showed up—little, like a dab of cotton. A captain in a khaki shirt came striding over my way. He looked angry.

" 'What the devil you doing here with a camera?'

" 'Taking a picture,' I answered perfectly foolishly.

" 'Get out! It's dangerous; don't you know that?'

"And I, poor fool, thought he meant that a gun might burst and hurt me. I had no idea he was referring to anything else until just at that instant I heard, *Fee—wee—wee—wee—bam!*

"That first shell killed a mule near the limbers behind us; the second came a minute later and killed two of Grimes's men, Helm and Underwood, not twenty-five yards away from where I stood. I began to understand then what that mad captain meant. But still the single idea with me was that I must get plenty of pictures. This was fighting; this was the first real battle of the war; I might never have another chance. I remember now that every time I heard that *Fee—wee—wee—wee* I would sing out, 'Keep a-goin'! Keep a-goin'! Keep a-goin'!'

"Somebody had told me down at Siboney that you never can hear the shell that's going to kill you. I don't know if that is reassuring."

Hare told how, as the fire of Grimes's Battery slackened, he had wandered, unhindered, along the line of battle-front to where Parker's jackass-battery was coming up on the double and unlimbering for action. There he met Scovel again and got two crackers and a piece of raw bacon from his pocket—the first meal. Then he turned back on the road from Siboney, where the oncoming regiments were deploying in open order under fire.

"I actually was ashamed of the American army," Hare declared with a whimsical grimace. "I had seen the pictures, you know, of the 'thin red line' and of somebody or other charging at Plevna or Borodino, shoulder to shoulder, and that was the sort of snapshot I expected to get—long lines of men breasting some hill, with shells raking their solid front. Instead of that I saw men sneaking through the long grass by twos and threes and dozens; they just dissolved from a solid company formation and ran. But they ran toward the line of blockhouses and trenches on the rim of the hills—not away from it! For a time I was so puzzled—so disappointed—that I did not think of taking any pictures. Anyway, how would two or three crouching soldiers look in a picture labeled 'Charging Up Kettle Hill'?

"And then I was so hungry—mortal hungry! When the first edge of excitement was blunted and the sun beat down steadily from the top of the sky I felt wavery and weary, and there was a gone space between my legs and my heart; I didn't seem to be walking on my own feet. I began to have a definite idea I was about to drop of starvation; I wondered if somebody would come along with a stretcher—men with Red Cross bandages on their arms—and carry me back to the rear in that unending procession of the wounded. Just then, when I was confident that I could not take ten more steps, along came Hemment, the photographer for the Hearst outfit. And his Jap valet was carrying a lunch-hamper—a lunch-hamper there on a battle-field! With napkins!"

The little man in khaki looked around the circle of faces on the boat-deck with humorous eyes. Quick answering smiles in sympathy met his. He made an expansive gesture with his hands and continued:

"And then I went back to the front to get more photographs. I felt more like it."

The war photographer told then of the taking of Kettle Hill as he had seen it done—a familiar story—and by a jump in his narrative, which may have concealed personal exploits no less daring than those of the infantrymen who made the dash up the unprotected side of the hill, he brought his listeners to this:

"And then Crane and I got into the second trench on the top of the hill, under fire, and there found Richard Harding Davis ahead of us. There I took the one

Digitized by Google

photograph—or, at least, made an attempt at a photograph—that of all that day I was the most proud.

"You see, the Spaniards still held the inner lines of defense beyond the hill, and the trench which the Rough Riders and the negro cavalrymen cleared out was just at the crest of the hill; so that a steady, level drift of machine-gun and volley firing passed over the brow of the hill and the top of the trench, so close to our heads that the showers of earth kicked up from the top of the trench sprayed down on our necks continuously. We could hear the constant *ping! ping!* of the bullets on the wire entanglements through which our men had cut their way to gain the trench.

"There we lay, wondering what was on the other side; how it looked just two feet above our heads where the fire-hose stream of lead was humming and singing. The more we talked about it the more curious we became. It actually came to be a pain, this desire of ours to look over to the forbidden territory.

"I felt that if I didn't know what was on the other side of that ridge of earth the whole battle wouldn't count for ten cents in recollection. So, without saying anything to Crane or Davis, I got my camera ready. Then I crouched, my finger on the shutter trigger, counted 'One, two, three!' and stood up.

"I held the camera on the level with my eyes as I jumped to my feet, snapped the shutter and dropped. It was over in a breath. I remember Crane's shout; he thought, of course, that I had received a bullet in the forehead. When he found I was unhurt he cursed me out as few men ever have done. And—" here Hare chuckled in tickled recollection—"I could not blame him.

"The picture, of course, I did not see until after the end of the war when I had returned to my office. It had not been reproduced, except in proof; it looked as if I had tried to snapshot a little corner of hell, so blurred and darkly weird was it. My managing editor asked me what I had tried to take when I got that result. I never told him, for in New York he could not have understood. That picture, however, and one other I hold as relics of my eternal damphoolishness."

Hare dropped his hands in a definitive gesture and, fixing his eyes again on the swiftly unwinding reel of the giant kinetoscope of mountain and shore, was silent. Those who had listened waited deferentially, then, after a minute, dropped the word which brought the story of that other monument to Jimmy Hare's utter depravity. At first the teller of tales demurred, pretended that it was not fit for an old dog such as he to be doing all the talking on a fine morning 'board ship. But the love of adventure, which is love of life with Hare, was too strong to be downed in its complement—yarning of adventures. Presently he was at it again in full swing.

He turned his back on the Cuban mountains and sketched for his audience a narrow valley lying bleak and sere between Manchurian mountains, its floor blocked and mapped by the contour lines of the Chinese peasants' fields; its sides rising steeply to rough sky-lines.

It was the valley of Chong-ju, beyond Liao-yang; the time, September of 1904. Through this gut in the mountains the beaten armies of Kuropatkin had just escaped from complete annihilation at Liao-yang, and Russian artillery was fighting daily rear-guard actions to block the pursuit of the victorious Japanese. It was Kuroki's First Army Corps that was feeling its swift way through the valley when the Russians' masked batteries, high up on the beetling cliffs, had given temporary check.

JAP ARTILLERY IN ACTION

"DURING the night following the opening fight," ran Hare's narrative, "the Japanese had planted a battery of artillery in a field of stacked *kowliang*, or maize, well up within range of the Russian position but on the floor of the valley, and had masked the presence of the guns very prettily with bundles of yellow corn. When morning broke, little Captain Okada told Maxwell, of the London *Standard*, and myself, the only correspondents left with the First Corps, that if we would accompany the military attachés to a place of his picking he would permit us to see a fine artillery duel. Well, we went; but it was the same old story. We were two miles from the Japanese batteries and there was nothing in it from my view-point.

"I fussed and worried around, suffering as I always did under the restrictions of the severe censorship which Captain Okada

Digitized by Google

always enforced with an angelic smile. Finally he turned to me and, pointing down to the valley below us, said jokingly, 'Mr. Hare, there would be a good place to get some excellent photographs.'

"'True for you, Captain,' I answered; and before he could stop me I was on the to'gallant deck of my big horse, and was tearing down across the fields. He had pointed out the Japanese position and I took him at his word. The attachés—Lieutenant-Colonel Hume, Captain Hegardt, the Swede, and the rest—told me afterward that they followed me all the way with their glasses. They added that Okada was as near being furiously angry as any Japanese ever shows himself. For, you understand, the Russians could follow me with their glasses, too, and I went straight for that battery, masked behind the shocks of *kowliang*. The Russkies hadn't been able to locate it up to that time.

"I tied my horse by a deserted farmhouse and started running across the fields toward the guns I could see a half mile ahead. The firing lulled just as I came to another house. There I found a China boy, poking his head out of a dugout like a chipmunk in his hole, and I had him give me a lift to the roof of the house. He thought I must be mad, no doubt, and when, just as I was pawing my way up the thatched roof, *Whang!* came another shell, the brat scurried for his hole and I was left alone on the ridge-pole.

"I took several pictures, but I was not near enough to get a good effect of the bursting shells; so I clambered down and began to dip and dodge across the open again where the shells were dropping. I made straight for a stone wall and embankment behind which a line of infantry reserves was crouched. The nearest guns were about five hundred yards beyond the wall—six of them strung out in position behind a thin line of little trees across the face of a wide field.

"I paused to get a picture of the reserves as I dodged, head bent as if under spray from a fire hose, up to their position. Dozens of them were actually asleep in all that splitting crash of shells. One fellow grinned kindly and beckoned me to come and get under cover. I did, all right; it was getting mighty hot—especially, I suppose, because the Russians had traced my course across the field."

Hare digressed at this point to tell the uninitiated just how an exploding shell sounds. These Russian shells had a lisping foreign accent, too. After the first ear-splitting crash of the bursting charge follows a diversity of sounds, according to the photographer's expert testimony.

The case gives a fine treble whine as it flies on murder bent; the bullets sing in increased tempo before they *thud-thud* to earth and there is a something—Hare thought it must be the detonating nose of the shell—which has a distinctive note all its own. The air concussion at the instant of the shell's explosion was so strong as to "trip off" the shutter of his camera in some instances.

"I never knew how a rabbit feels with the hounds after him until that moment," said Hare.

"Over the rough ground I scurried, straight for one of the guns ahead. Twice during the dash I heard the crash of a bursting shell and felt the jar of its wind against my cheek.

"Once I stopped and took a snap, squatting down and leveling my camera at the white puff of smoke that hung fifteen or twenty feet above ground. I could see the little dust spurts below the shell, where the shrapnel plowed into the field; in fact, the camera saw them, too, and caught them on the film, as I discovered months later.

"Of course the gunners were furious; they waved me back when they saw me approach, and I thought for a minute that one of them might drop me with a revolver-bullet. For I had no business there; I was drawing the Russian fire right up to the hidden guns. But I didn't go until I had taken several pictures.

"The snaps I took were certainly worth the risk. Never will I get such pictures again. There were the low-lying guns, each sunk in the furrows of the plowed field with a mound of earth, screened by shocks of the *kowliang*, piled up to the muzzle before it; pits for the gunners behind the breech.

"One of the three or four men serving each gun was always buried up to his neck in the hole behind the wheels; they took turns in filling this favored shelter. The others crouched behind the screen over the barrel, moving from breech to shell-case and back again with quick, cat-like dashes. When the gun was fired, only a thin gray

Digitized by Google

veil of vapor spurted from the muzzle—not to be seen at two hundred yards away.

"*Click-click!* and I had my pictures, then was racing back for the friendly wall where the infantry reserves lay. I had not got one hundred yards away from the gun I snapshotted last when the roar of a shell sounded. I wheeled and took the picture of the deadly cloud of white. It was hovering directly over the spot where I had stood not two minutes before. The gun-crew was wiped out, and the piece itself demolished.

"There was nothing for me to do then but hike once more across the open zone of fire to the farmhouse where my horse was tied; thence back to where the attachés were watching the fight under the eye of Captain Okada.

"Besides the exposed roll of films in my camera, filled with wonderful pictures, I had in my pocket two mementoes—one a fragment of shell I had picked up, still scorching hot; the other an entry I had made in my little memorandum book. I had scribbled the line on a blank page while I lay behind the wall with the reserves.

" 'Hare has gone too far this time,' was the way it read."

THAT WHICH IS WRITTEN

By
William
Patterson
White

Author of "The Dynamite Cargo."

YE'LL mind I've always had an eye for beauty—black hair and blue eyes preferred. But I've no objection to a blonde lass if her lines are good. Lola Almavar was a blonde, and she made a fool of me proper. I had small use for any woman for a good two months after she left Dar el Dana.

As I say, I've an eye for a pretty woman; but ye'd hardly think I'd look twice at a slave-girl, would ye now? Right. But this slave-girl was a Circassian. And a beautiful woman she was, too. Not a day over twenty, and all curves and dimples. Her hair was black, and her eyes were blue, and her eyelashes were as long as the homeward-bound pennant of a battle-ship. With such lines and looks 'tis no wonder she pleased me.

Her name was Zorayda, and Sheik Absalaam of Marandia gave her to Ibrahim el Kaid, the Pasha of Dar el Dana. Ibrahim had cut off the head of Sheik Absalaam's best enemy, and the Sheik wanted to return the favor.

I'd been living in the Pasha's house the best part of six months, and was just thinking of leaving when Sheik Absalaam sent

Digitized by Google

his present. So I stayed on. Ibrahim gave Zorayda to his oldest wife, and I saw quite a bit of the girl. Zorayda could dance like a dervish, and much more graceful; and Ibrahim, of an evening, would have her come up on the roof to dance for us in the moonlight. Man dear! I can see Zorayda yet—whirling and stepping, and the moonlight shimmering on her bracelets and ankle-rings.

Ibrahim always turned in early, and when he'd gone below Zorayda would stay up on the roof with me, and I'd play for her on my mouth-organ. Oh, ay, good Scotch tunes —"The Rowan Tree," "Bonnie Doon," "Jock o' Hazeldene," and all the rest. Zorayda liked "Bonnie Doon" best. Bobbie Burns, ye'll mind, and 'twas that made me like her at the first. 'Twas odd, amazing odd, to find a Circassian slave-girl on the African North Coast with a taste for Burns.

In ten days I liked her fine. No, no, I didn't kiss her. I can do the polite as well as anybody, and I treated her as quite the lady. And that was odd, too. 'Tis not my nature to keep my arm away when there's a lassie's waist close to. But Zorayda was no ordinary lass. She was a slave, and helpless, so I let be. But I talked to her. I had the Arabic, and many a conversation there was up on that roof.

ONE morning, when Zorayda had been at Ibrahim's a full month, three Moors of Zandar brought Ibrahim a message from their Pasha, Abdul Said. The three jossers said that Zorayda had been stolen by Sheik Absalaam from the Pasha of Zandar, and the Pasha had just found out where she was. Now he wanted her sent back to Zandar, and quick, too. Oh, the three lads spoke up like they owned all Morocco. I looked for Ibrahim to lose his temper, but he didn't.

"A strange tale," said Ibrahim, when the three Moors had done. "How do I know thou art men of Zandar? A lie is no difficult matter—and the girl is of great value."

"True," said the tallest Moor, a skinny-faced lad with cro'-jack eyes. "But we are true men—soldiers of the Pasha's guard. I am the Captain of the guard. Ask thou of Ben Hassan the slave-dealer whether I speak truth. The slave-dealer hath good cause to know me."

So Ben Hassan the slave-dealer was called in, and he identified the tall Moor as Mohammed Mizraim, the Captain of Abdul Said's guard. Ben Hassan did more than that. He invited the tall Moor to come down on the beach and have his heart cut out. He was an old enemy of Ben Hassan, was the tall Moor, and this was the first time the slave-dealer had seen him for many a year.

But the tall Moor wouldn't go. He said he'd come to Dar el Dana for business, not amusement, and Ben Hassan would just have to wait. I misdoubt Ben Hassan would have turned rusty right then, but Ibrahim said there'd be no scrapping with ambassadors while he was Pasha. Ben Hassan was a big man in Dar el Dana, but Ibrahim was bigger, and if ye weren't his friend ye needed to look out. So Ben Hassan sheathed his knife and slanted away one time.

Ibrahim told the Moors they'd have to wait three days while he thought over the matter. Mohammed Mizraim wouldn't agree at first, but one of the other lads nudged him and spoke in his ear, and then he said he would. I'd an idea they might be up to some deviltry, the merrybegotten scum, so I just thought I'd watch them careful.

I slanted away quick to find Zorayda. She was on the roof under the awning. I told her what was up, and she went white. Then she began to cry. Man dear! 'Tis fearsome to watch a lass cry, expecially such a handsome one as Zorayda. So I comforted her all I knew. 'Twas the first time I'd ever had my arms around her, but she put both arms around my neck quite like an old friend, and sobbed like a bilge-pump.

"Oh," she said between the tears, "I do not want to go back to Zandar. I did not speak of my master, Abdul Said, to thee, or any one, for I feared that I should be sent back. I do not want to go! I do not want to go! Abdul Said hath promised me to Mohammed Mizraim, the Captain of the guard, and Mohammed Mizraim is cruel as the snake is cruel. I am only a slave-girl, to be bought and sold by whoever so wills, but —I do not want to go!"

And she hung to me tight and cried more than ever. Man dear, 'twas pitiful; and I patted her head, and said I'd talk to Ibrahim. I'd no mind to see the little lass handed over to Mohammed Mizraim. I'd a little money, not near enough to buy her, but Ibrahim was my friend, and I knew he'd do more than a bit for me. Friendship

Digitized by Google

to a Moor means something more than a handshake and the time o' day.

"Be not afraid," said Ibrahim, when I talked to him that evening. "Zorayda remaineth in my house. The three days are but to gain time. Abdul Said, as thou knowest, is powerful. When his messengers return with my refusal, he will without doubt attack Dar el Dana. Wherefore I have sent a camel-rider to Sheik Absalaam bidding him come with all his fighting-men to Dar el Dana. On the heels of the messengers we will attack Zandar. It is always well to strike the first blow."

"I'll go with you," I said, and Ibrahim nodded his head slow.

Ibrahim had the English all right, but he preferred Arabic, and he always spoke it to me. After he'd filled a pipe with *kief* and taken a couple of lungfuls, he looked at me sharp and his eyes twinkled.

"In the matter of Zorayda," he said, "dost thou find her comely?"

"Very handsome," said I. "I've not seen her like in New York or New Orleans—London either, for that matter."

"She is a slave—wouldst thou wed her?"

Coming straight to the point like that made me fair blink. I checked a bit. Ibrahim looked at me hard.

"I don't know," I said. And no more I did.

"Thou art my friend," said Ibrahim. "We are as brothers, thou and I. I hoped to see thee take one of our maidens to wife, and so live among us always. But it was not to be. The *N'zaranee* woman, Lola Almavar—no, I will speak no more of her. Cometh now Zorayda—a slave. Yet thou dost look kindly upon her. My friend, if thou wilt marry her, I will give Zorayda her freedom."

I scratched my head and stared hard at the ground. I wasn't any too sure I loved her. Her being what she was, a slave, made it a hard question to answer offhand. I thought hard, I can tell you.

ZORAYDA was beautiful. I knew that. And she was a loving lass. I had my house and all with Ibrahim. 'Twas a lazy life—when there was no fighting—and I enjoyed it. I'd always followed the sea, in an engine-room, and living in Dar el Dana with naught to do was very pleasant.

After all, why not? Ye'll mind I'd been on the African North Coast a long time, and the North Coast makes ye look at things in a different way than ye would at home. Another thing—if I married Zorayda 'twould set her free. I could not get her freedom any other way.

Ibrahim was my friend and all, but asking him for Zorayda's liberty without doing as he wanted in the way of marriage would be like asking your best friend to give ye his house and a bit of ground. It couldn't be done, ye see. I've never believed much in philanthropy, but 'twould be a good action if I married Zorayda. Lord knows I've few enough to my credit. I looked up quick and said I'd marry her.

"It is well," said Ibrahim, nodding his head pleased like. "She will make thee a good wife."

I was sure of that, and I slanted away quick to tell her about it. She was not on the roof. I sent a slave to the women's apartments to find her. She wasn't there either. I began to worry. I ran quick and told Ibrahim.

"Mohammed Mizraim!" said Ibrahim. "Have he and those others left the house?"

Ibrahim and I both searched the house. There was no sign of Zorayda and the three Moors of Zandar. Man dear! I was in a stew! And I'd meant to watch those three lads!

We questioned all the slaves. None of 'em had seen any of the four that evening. One slave was always stationed at the door leading to the street, and this one swore no one had passed by him. So we searched the garden. In the garden I found the marks of Moorish slippers in the flower beds. The tracks led toward the garden wall. Close in to the wall I picked up a bracelet. When I'd last seen that bracelet 'twas on Zorayda's right arm!

'Twas all plain enough then. The three messengers had carried her off. Oh, ay, they could get her away easy enough. The town wall was close by, and once on that 'twas only the matter of a rope to slide down. We found the rope next day. And in the sand, behind a hillock, were the tracks of four camels. They led toward Zandar.

Now that I'd lost her, the full knowledge of what she meant to me hit me strong. I misdoubt 'tis the same the world over. A man don't know what he wants till it's taken from him. I knew I loved Zorayda,

Digitized by Google

and I'd a mind to get her back. I told Ibrahim just that, and he agreed with me. 'Twas an insult to his hospitality, he said, and he'd get revenge or know the reason why.

"We must not move hastily," said Ibrahim. "I will send Selim the camel-driver —a cunning man and a brave—to Zandar. Without revealing himself he will learn the whole truth of this matter."

Next morning Selim the camel-driver slanted away for Zandar. I'd a hard time of it with naught to do. I was hot to come to handgrips with Mohammed Mizraim. Two days later Sheik Absalaam and six hundred fighting-men rode into Dar el Dana. The Sheik vowed 'twould be a pleasure to attack Zandar. Indeed and indeed, Abdul Said was a bit unpopular with Absalaam of Marandia.

The Sheik admitted stealing Zorayda from the Pasha of Zandar. He'd done it in a raid, and he was no end proud of it. The Sheik and Ibrahim smoked *kief* together and drank sweet, sirupy tea with mint leaves in it, and told each other what they'd do to the Pasha of Zandar when they got him.

Twenty-four hours after the Sheik Absalaam rode in, Selim the camel-driver returned from Zandar. He'd news in plenty. He said that Zorayda was back in the Pasha's palace, and that Mohammed Mizraim and his two friends had managed it. He said, too, that all Zandar was laughing at Ibrahim for being bested so easy. Ibrahim smiled slow when he heard that last. I'd seen him smile that way before. Some one of his enemies always died soon after.

IT DOESN'T take long to get a Moorish army together. Moors are always ready for a fight. By noon next day Ibrahim and a good two thousand men, with Sheik Absalaam and his six hundred, were ten miles out of Dar el Dana. I rode alongside of Ibrahim. Oh, ay, I'm no rider, but my grandfather, Big Sandy Kennedy, was a blacksmith, so I've a vested right in horses, and ye can't fall out of a Moorish saddle anyway.

Zandar lay on the coast thirty miles to the no'th'ard, and a strong-looking place it was when I sighted it at dawn. The walls were high, and there were more towers scattered about than ye'll see on most Moorish walls. On the seaward side was a fort, and 'twas there that the Pasha lived.

Abdul Said must have known we were coming, for he loosed off a cannon when the head of the army showed on a sand-hill a mile from town. The shot fell short, but Ibrahim halted his men right there. He'd a plan, and he had to wait till night came on.

This was the scheme:

Two hours after midnight Sheik Absalaam and his six hundred were to make a false attack on the landward side of Zandar. They had orders to make all the noise they could, so Abdul Said would think the whole army was in it, and rush reinforcements to that side. Then, when Ibrahim judged the time was ripe, he himself would try to burn down the main gate of the fort. Once the gate was down the rest would be easy. 'Twas a good plan if Abdul Said reduced the garrison of the fort. If he didn't—well, there'd be more widows than wives in Dar el Dana.

Sheik Absalaam slanted away for his post before sunset. The time from midnight on seemed an eternity, I can tell you. Man dear! I smoked and smoked and it did me no good at all. The thought of Zorayda back in Abdul Said's power near had me off center. He'd the reputation of a cruel man, had the Pasha of Zandar. I'd 'a' given a month's pay for four fingers o' whisky, but there was none to be got this side of Ceuta.

'Twas a great relief to hear the sudden rattle and bang of Sheik Absalaam's gunfire. Then the rifles began to sputter along the landward wall. Ibrahim moved forrard at once. Two hundred yards from the fort he halted his army behind a low ridge of sand. Some forty men who owned black *djelabs* came up from the rear. Each of 'em carried a bundle of straw, and I sniffed the reek o' kerosene. Right. The Moor ain't quite as uncivilized as ye think.

I stuck close to Ibrahim as he led his crowd over the sand. We walked quiet, and that's no merry jest. If not a full garrison, there'd be sentries in that fort anyway. Right under the fort wall we got and no alarm yet. I heard the rasp of the straw as the Moors piled it up against the gate. Of a sudden there came a yell from the fort wall. Then the flare of the burning straw lit up the whole scene.

We all ran back to the shelter of the ridge, but not before lead slugs had flicked out the lives of three of our men. The whole army lined the ridge and began to shoot at the

Digitized by Google

lads on the wall. Ye could not see the gate for the flames. They lifted a good twenty feet above the sand. Soon I saw the yellow flames change to orange and red, and I knew the gate was blazing. I looked at Ibrahim. His lips were drawn back over his teeth, and he was crouched down like a wildcat ready to jump.

Of a sudden Ibrahim bawled the name of Allah and headed for the gate full speed. Right at his heels ran a dozen Moors carrying a heavy log. The rest of the lads weren't far astern. They came on willing as could be. Ibrahim and I reached the gate together. The straw had burned down, but the gate was flaming.

CRASH! The twelve Moors drove the log at the timbers. Twice more the ram hit the gate, and the last blow stove her in. One of the doors fell away entirely, and the other swung back. I could see no men inside. That was odd, and I wondered. Then I saw the firelight flicker on a line of gun barrels in a gallery of the courtyard. I sensed what was up, and I grabbed Ibrahim by the shoulders and pulled him down. We both went flat just in time. I'd hardly touched the ground when a volley roared out, and the bullets whistled over our heads.

The rest of the men outside raised a shout and piled in through the gate. Ibrahim and I scrambled up and ran in too. I'd an idea that Abdul Said hadn't fallen in with Ibrahim's plan, and I knew that courtyard would be no sanitary place. It wasn't.

Just as I'd misdoubted, Ibrahim's men began to get the worst of it. The galleries round the courtyard were filled with soldiers, every man pulling trigger for all he knew. There were barricades at the three entrances of the courtyard.

Ibrahim's men hadn't a chance. They were trapped.

That courtyard was a butcher shop in full blast. The smoke hung thick and choking. Through it flickered the red glare of the burning gate and the flashes of guns. A Moor next to me was shot in the throat and fell in a heap, gurgling and clucking. Another got a bullet in the head and leaped straight up, then came down spread-eagled on the stones. I'd lost sight of Ibrahim, and I began to wonder when I'd get it. I shoved over to one side where the crowd wasn't so thick; for if I had to be shot, I'd a mind to go peaceful. I did not want to be trampled on.

I got over next the wall and fired all I knew at the line of flashes over my head I misdoubt if I made any hits, but 'twas a great comfort just to pull trigger. There was an iron-faced door in the wall close to me, and I leaned against it while I was reloading my revolver. Of a sudden I heard a bar pulled out of its socket behind the door.

"Here's a go," thought I. "They're coming out."

I stood back, ready to drop the first lad. The door flew open. But no Moor came out. Instead, Zorayda stood in the doorway, screaming for Ibrahim's men to come on.

I jumped forward and yelled. There was a light in a niche back of the doorway, and I saw Mohammed Mizraim right behind Zorayda. He'd a knife in his hand, and was swinging up his arm for the blow.

I pulled trigger quick, but Mohammed Mizraim drove the knife home, and Zorayda fell forward on her face. I gave the Moor every load in my gun, and he crumpled down like a dropped coat.

I picked up Zorayda and shielded her as best I could, for Ibrahim's men were pouring in through that door like wild tigers. I pushed out into the courtyard and laid her down on a *djelab*. I wasn't thinking of stray bullets then. Zorayda was dead. Poor lass! She gave her life to let in Ibrahim's men. She didn't live long enough for me to tell her I loved her and meant to marry her.

When the fighting was over Ibrahim found me sitting beside Zorayda. Dawn was lightening the courtyard. The Pasha of Dar el Dana showed what he'd been through. His *djelab* was gone, and his short Riffian trousers and shirt were mucked up with red stains. He looked at what lay in front of me.

"That which is to be, will be," said Ibrahim, "and the fate of each man is written large upon his forehead. It was written that she should die that we might live. It was also written that Abdul Said should die. I myself killed him with a knife. We have won. Listen to the shouts, O my friend. The men of Dar el Dana and Marandia are now sacking Zandar."

Digitized by Google

The MAN-TRAIL

A Four-Part Story—Part III

By Henry Oyen

Author of "The Snow Burner."

SYNOPSIS—Hating business and liking the out-of-doors, a failure in the eyes of his rich father, *John Peabody*, big-muscled and twenty, takes a position with his uncle, "*Wolf John*" *Peabody*, a grim old lumber-king of the North woods. Arrived at Peabody Point *John* receives a cordial welcome from his uncle's adopted daughter *Belle*, but from *Wolf John* only the gruff information that he must work or starve; that his name thenceforth will be *Jack Mudd*, not *Peabody* and that foreman *Bull Bart* will break him in at Main Camp.

Thinking *John* has found favor in *Belle's* eyes, *Bul Bart* determines to break his spirit and therefore makes him sawing-partner with champion-sawye *Norby* But the latter takes a liking to the newcomer and helps him bear the strain o those first back-breaking days.

John learns they are about to mov camp to the King Pines, a primeval tract held on a one-year lease by *Wolf John*, but desired by the disreputable gang at Whisky Landing, in the employ of the Trust. *Norby* hints at *Bull Bart's* desire to wed *Belle* and inherit the Peabody interests, and *John's* blood starts boiling.

John gains the friendship of old *Nels*, the teamster, who warns him against *Bart*. Returning to Main Camp on Christmas Eve, after dinner at Peabody Point, *John* saves the life of *Bart's* mistress and from her learns *Bart's* real character. On the next day, in *Bart's* absence, *John* takes temporary command at Main Camp, saving the Company's property from depredations at the hands of drunken employees.

At a camp-dance the same night, *Wolf John*, as a reward introduces *John* as his nephew. After encouraging the attentions of *John*, *Belle* refuses to marry *Bart*, who thereupon goes over to the side of the trust, after denouncing *Wolf John* publicly and promising trouble if the King Pines are touched. Whereupon young *John Peabody* is given *Bart's* position as boss.

CHAPTER XX

OLD NELS TAKES A TRICK

IT WAS well into the morning when John stood with the crew in the camp clearing and watched the last sleigh-load of dancers jingle merrily away toward Peabody Point. He stood and looked down the tote-road long after the sleigh had disappeared from view, long after the jingle of sleighbells came floating back to his ears. Belle was in that sleigh. She had gone. And that night he realized that Belle had come to mean so much to him that it was pain to part with her. He felt small and weak before the courage that she had shown on this night.

"We mustn't let Uncle John know that I know," she had whispered last of all; and throughout the evening she had smiled and danced and chattered until Wolf John had beamed in pleasure over her apparent happiness.

"Gee, Mud—I mean, Mr. Peabody—" it was Dugan who was almost whispering at his side—"do you feel that way, too?"

"What way, you red-headed imp?" demanded John, coming out of his revery.

"Did you see Hulda when she left me?" Dugan was looking dreamily out on the

Digitized by Google

road. "She—she's too good for me, I know that. I ain't—I ain't nothing compared to her. But, what d'you think, Mud—I mean, Mr. Peabody—she says she'll marry me as soon's I'm a cook! Gee! Gimme a job cooking for some camp soon's you can, will you, Mr. Peabody?"

"I'll give you a clout in the ear if you come 'mistering' me, young fellow," laughed John, throwing an arm around the boy's shoulders. Then he grew grimly serious.

"Run and find where Wolf John's bunking, Dugan, and see if he's asleep. If he is, don't wake him. If he isn't, come and tell me, and I'll go see him."

Wolf John was not asleep. John found him as he was about to crawl into a bunk in Nels' quarters at the stables.

"Get 'em to bed, John," yawned the old man, a boot in his hand. "They'll only get two or three hours' sleep as it is."

"Why get them to bed at all?" said John.

"Huh?" Wolf John's gray brows came together, puzzled.

"That's what I came to see you about, Uncle John. The men are all keyed up after the dance. They're still larking around. They don't want to go to bed; they want more excitement. Why not give it to them? Let them start tearing camp down right away. I can start them. I know your plans. We'll start on the bunk-house. We'll have that down and on the sleighs by daylight. Have I your permission?"

Wolf John crawled into his bunk with the movements and sounds of an old bear bedding down in its lair.

"I don't believe you need anybody's permission, youngster," he grumbled. "You seem to have left the old man high and dry on the bank right at the jump."

John returned to the bunk-house where most of the men were cheering a friendly wrestling match between Dugan and Whitey Jack.

"Go on; heave him over your shoulder, Dugan; he said you was red-headed. Down him, Jack, down him; he's young enough to be your grandson. Shame on you, Red, for picking on such a kid."

As Whitey Jack saw John he laughingly let go.

"Boys, there's just one way to wind up a big night like this," said John. "Let's make it a good one; let's tear the old camp down right now."

The shout that greeted him told how well he had gauged the feelings of the men.

"Tear 'er down! Betcher life! Wind the night up right. Ro-oll out, lumberjacks, and take the roof off her!"

With whoops and yells, like so many boy giants turned loose at rough play, they swarmed for lanterns, axes, peavies, canthooks. Some of the older men already had gone to bunk in the cook-shack and stables; others grumblingly went their way, now protesting that they had had enough foolishness for one night. But sixty men, the pick and youth of the camp, swarmed upon the bunk-house with tools in their hands.

Lanterns bobbed and winked about the scene. There was the noise of roof boards being ripped loose, of wall logs pried off and falling rumblingly upon the frozen ground, and the mighty "Yo, heave 'er!" of a score of men lifting the big timbers on to the waiting sleighs. When Main Camp went to breakfast that morning, there was only a bare spot and a pile of rubbish where the bunk-house had been—the house itself, in parts, was chained on a dozen big sleighs, waiting only the hooking-on of horses to start for its new location in the King Pines.

"It ain't logging," protested Whitey Jack. "No sir; moving a camp in Winter ain't logging—but, gee, she certainly did come down!"

Wolf John appeared, mittened and mackinawed, stamping the ground, at breakfast.

"Where's old Nels?" he demanded of John. "Tell him to hook a horse to the double cutter. We'll drive up there first, you'n and I and Whitey Jack, and have the buildings located by the time the first sleigh gets there."

BUT old Nels was nowhere to be found in camp. He had appeared early at the cook-shack, volunteered Dugan, had eaten a bite before the other men had come in, and after that he had vanished from the sight of men. A thought struck John and he hastened to Nels' bunk and looked at the two buck-heads where Nels hung his rifle. The rifle was gone. Wherefore John was not at all surprised when, in the rising daylight, Whitey Jack drove him and Wolf John out toward the King Pines to find the imprint of Nels' rubbers before them in the snow of the road.

"Nels must know where there's a deer yarding and's gone out to get him," said

Digitized by Google

Brackett, wrinkling one side of his old face in a colossal wink. Whitey Jack had taken his own 30-30 in the sleigh beside him, "in case we run into a buck on the road."

Wolf John was raging.

"—— his old Norsky hide! I won't have any of that gun-expert business. I don't hire men to do my fighting. When I get ready to wipe out that gang up there I'll go up to Whisky Falls and kick the whole mess into the river. I don't go hiding behind any hired shooter, like Jim Lowrey. I'll have a word for Nels' ear when he comes back."

At the edge of the swamp Nels' tracks swung off the road and instead of continuing straight toward the spot where the camp was to be located made a sweeping curve in the direction of Whisky Falls. In curiosity Whitey Jack got out and carefully examined the tracks.

"The little son-of-a-gun!" he chortled as he climbed back into the sleigh. "He's over an hour ahead of us. Must have gone in the dark. Well, I'll bet there won't be anybody running down from the Falls to bother us today; little old Nels will be setting on the run-way asking tickets of anybody trying to get by. Cripes!"

Far up the marsh a black speck showed as it rose from behind a clump of snow-covered alders; a spit of fire in the semi-daylight, a whining sound sweeping over their heads so closely that they ducked. The vicious crack of a high-power rifle came floating after it.

Then the black speck vanished behind its hiding-place. But only for a second. It rose again! Then suddenly it ducked without firing. Beyond it, from behind a sheltering tussock, came another flash of spitting fire; then a boom, louder, heavier than the first report.

"That's Nels!" cried John as he leaped out and forced the horse back into the shelter of the timber. "That's his old 45-90. God!"

Once more the quiet of dawn was ripped by the spiteful crack of the nearer rifle. But this time it was not turned on the three in the sleigh, but on the tussock from behind which had come the second shot. One, two, three shots; then stillness. No reply from the 45-90. Nothing.

"He got him," gasped Whitey Jack. "Poor old Nels; he got him sure!"

The figure behind the alders seemed to be of the same impression. Cautiously it lifted itself. It stood out black against the snow-covered bushes for an instant, then as a streak of flame came swiftly from a spot to one side of the tussock it dropped its rifle, ducked, and with one arm swinging wildly ran with queer, jerky motions for the shelter of near-by trees.

"Curly Joe!" growled Whitey Jack. "See the gait of him! Nels got him in the right arm!"

The three men in the timber saw a figure rise to one knee where the last shot had come from.

"Nels!" cried John, recognizing the teamster's cap.

Slowly they saw Nels' rifle come to a steady aim at the fleeing man. To John the seconds seemed to be minutes of agony while he waited fearfully for the fatal roar of the big gun. They saw the rifle-barrel move as it followed the gunman's twisted flight. And then—what John had hoped for—they saw the rifle slowly lowered, saw Nels stand up, let the hammer down and stand with the rifle in the crook of his arm, while Curly Joe, whose life had been spared because he had no gun, made his escape into the dark, screening timber.

A wild, explosive yell of relief broke from John's pent-up lungs.

"Good boy, Nels; good boy!" he cried. "He wouldn't kill him—he saw he wasn't armed!"

Whitey Jack and Wolf John looked at the young man curiously.

"You act like you were glad that killer got away," said Wolf John curtly.

"I am. It would have been too tough—the other thing."

"He didn't have a show, of course, but——" Whitey Jack nodded grudgingly.

"But the next shot he'd have had the range on us," roared the old man, "and d'you think it would have stopped him to see we weren't shooting back? Get in; drive on. Nels gave 'em a taste of our medicine anyway," he concluded with a grim smile. "They'll take their time before trading any more gun-plays with the old Norsky. Whip up, Whitey Jack; we've lost ten minutes. Say nothing about this to any of the boys."

It was when they were well across the timber and entering the King Pines that John thought of the fact that he had heard a deadly bullet whistle within a foot of his

Digitized by Google

head and that he should have been afraid.

"Bart did that, didn't he?" he said as the thought came to him suddenly. "Bart sent that fellow there; nobody else knew we'd be along here this morning."

"Bart did it," agreed Wolf John. "And Bart knows enough about Nels' shooting to know that he'll have to rig up something besides a straight out-and-out fight to keep us from logging. We've got to keep our eyes peeled, though, youngster; there's pretty near as much fox in Bart as there is bull."

CHAPTER XXI

THE NEW FOREMAN

WOLF JOHN was right. The procession of sleighs bearing the dismantled bunk-house came clanking over the marsh and into the King Pines, and the work of setting up a new camp began without any sign of interference from the gang at Whisky Falls. The sleighs were unloaded swiftly by the men who had accompanied them, and the work of clearing away the snow and laying the floor timbers for the new bunk-house had begun before the teams had been swung around and sent back to Main Camp for the cook-shack, which the crew that had been left at the old camp even then were busy dismantling.

"It ain't logging," protested Whitey Jack over and over again. "No, sir; moving a camp in the middle of Winter like this ain't logging, but as long as she's started nobody's got a right to play high-banker."

Though the majority of the men had not closed their eyes the night before, there were but a few of them who grumbled and hung back at the idea of working all day as well. French Jimmy, the man who had attempted to lead a raid on the stables Christmas Eve, and whom John had knocked down, was the leader of the discontented ones. He did his best to hold back the job; grumbled that they were being ill used, that they might as well "soldier" now that Bart was gone, because they could run the camp about as they saw fit now, and offered to go up and tell Wolf John that they didn't intend to do double time, if the men would agree to back him up. Two or three men agreed with him, and French Jimmy approached Norby whose great shoulders at that moment were shoving a base-log into position. Norby had picked up carpentering some time in his wanderings and was directing the erection of the buildings.

"Don' mak' slave of yourself," said French Jimmy.

"Bart, he's no' here no more. We mak' job in thees camp easy cinch, eh? We ain' go'n' keel ourself hustling for Wolf John and dat fool neveu, eh? Come on; we tell 'em go to ——"

Norby straightened up slowly, smiling innocently.

"You mean we shall put the job on the bum, eh?"

"Tha's eet, tha's eet! We go'n'—Sacre! What do you mean?"

Norby's long right arm licked out and a hand like a bear's paw jerked him off his feet. Gently but firmly Norby held him by the scruff of the neck and bumped his forehead against the base-log three times.

"Take hold there, Frenchy," he commanded. "You think you will put the camp on the bum, eh? Well just for that I will make it my business to see that you work just a little bit harder than any other man on the job. Take hold."

French Jimmy writhed and swore viciously in two tongues.

"You ain' mah boss; lemme go!"

"I am your boss," said Norby. "I am man enough to boss you. Take hold."

John soon noticed that Norby not only was directing the placing of the timbers of the bunk-house but was acting as boss of the job, driving French Jimmy and his companions to their work as fiercely as Bart ever drove.

"Norby," he said, calling him to one side, "how would you like to be straw-boss on this building job?"

Norby smiled and shook his head.

"I am a good man when I am under somebody else," he said, "but I have been working under other men too long to be worth my salt when I am head man. You boss me, and I boss them, and we will do well; but if you make me boss of myself and them I will be no good."

WOLF JOHN began the morning with a rush that reminded the older men of the time when he was the hardest-working, hardest-driving walking-boss on the Brulé River. He rushed the crew around until the sites for the various buildings had been selected, the snow cleared away and the ground leveled. He

Digitized by Google

took Whitey Jack, John and two ax-men with him into the woods, laid out the line of the main road—an easy task, for the great trees stood so far apart that few needed to be felled for a straight road, and the ground was level—and had a crew set to work at road-making.

"No swamping, easy skidding, easy logging," he said as he looked around at the clean woods with little or no underbrush. "We'll log more logs per man than we ever did before. John, it's a great game, logging; it's man's work."

After an hour or so his rushing leadership began to falter. He was content to sit in his cutter watching John as he led the crews at their various tasks, occasionally barking out a word of advice or command.

"The old man's fading," said Whitey Jack sorrowfully. "This camp is going to be all shot to pieces for a boss, I'm afraid, unless the young un makes good. They certainly are going to be crippled without Bull Bart. The old man don't belong in the bush any more. It's up to the young fellow."

"Huh! If so, then all the more reason for us who've drawed his pay so long to log a little harder," said Norby, and Whitey Jack agreed.

The attitude of the men toward John, with the exception of French Jimmy and a few others of his ilk, had not changed perceptibly since Wolf John's announcement of his nephew's true name and position. Men in the woods do not fawn to authority. Each man knows that he is as good as the next fellow until the latter proves the contrary with the strength of his bare hands, and there is no room in the camps for any man who can not do his full day's work.

Having done it, the logger asks no favors, yields no servility to any boss or owner. The men acknowledged the receipt of John's proper name and condition by calling him "Peabody," "John," or "Jack," where formerly it had been "Mud." He was one of them, even if he was a boss. If he had not been one of them they would soon have made him weary of the woods.

"Of course I knew he wasn't no common guy hunting for a job," said Brackett, the big top-loader. "You could tell by his talk he wasn't no common stiff."

"I could tell by the way he stuck with me that first day, when I saw he was half dead after a couple hours," said Norby. "He wasn't built for a sawyer, but he stuck."

"I knew it, too," protested Burns, scratching his bandaged head. "Hang it if I could just tell why, but I knew it by the way we all piled in after him when he tackled that gang robbing the stables."

French Jimmy's sullen remembrance of the blow John had given him in the stables had blossomed into open hatred after hearing who and what John was. He was shrewd enough to keep his feelings hidden from John, but to those few who looked on him as a leader he confided his determination to get even for that blow. For the present, as he was under Norby's eye and within reach of Norby's right arm, French Jimmy was forced to work at the swift pace that the crews were setting in the erection of the new camp.

John threw himself into the task of rushing the work with all the energy in him. He knew that the majority of the men were his friends, and this knowledge gave him confidence. He did not drive; he knew that if he led the best men of the camp would follow him, just as they had followed into the stables on Christmas Eve.

When there was a fresh piece of work to be started, a heavy timber to be moved, a joist to be swung in place, he was the first to lay hold. He was doing more actual physical work than he had done even while sawing with Norby, but he did not know it. The exhilaration of the game spurred him and gave him added strength. His faculty for keeping those with whom he worked in good humor stood him in good stead. The men worked as steadily when he was absent as when he was with them.

From his seat in the sleigh Wolf John watched closely. When the second procession of sleighs came at noon, bearing at one time the cook-shack and the dinner which Fatty had cooked back at Main Camp before the shack had been torn down, he nodded approvingly.

"Cook-shack and bunk-house up by tonight," he said. "Stables, blacksmith, wood-butcher and wannigan up by Monday night. We'll be ready to start making sawlogs Tuesday morning."

"I've been thinking of that," replied John. "It seems to me that the thing to do is to get the work up here started before Bart and that gang can do anything to keep it from starting. The longer we delay the more time and chance they'll have to spring something to stop us. For one thing,

Digitized by Google

they're naturally figuring that the regular Saturday night and Sunday spree of the boys will give them a chance to put a crimp in us.

"Bart is a fox, as you say, and so is Wah Song if I'm any judge, and if they aren't planning at this moment to do their best tonight and tomorrow to keep as many men as possible from coming back to camp, or coming back fit to work, I miss my guess. Why wouldn't it be a good thing to work right through tomorrow, Sunday, and gain a day? Then we'd be ready to start logging Monday morning, which Bart and his gang won't expect."

Wolf John studied his nephew with frank curiosity.

"Youngster, are you letting your new partnership go to your head?"

"I hope not. Why?"

"Did you ever hear of a crew of lumber-jacks working through a Sunday with whisky only four or five miles away? If you think you can keep enough of the boys at work tomorrow to move the rest of the buildings up here, go ahead and see how bad you fall down."

"All right," said John, "I'll try."

THE noon meal, freshly heated over a hastily rigged-up range, had been placed on the long tables set up on the cleared spot where the cook-shack was to stand. With a last look to see that the food was ready, Dugan shouted his inviting, "Take 'er!" and the men rushed from their work to the tables. John had given orders to Fatty that the meal was to be a particularly good one, in spite of the kitchen's disruption, and he waited until the men had gorged themselves into a state of comfort before he spoke.

"Boys," he said bluntly, rising in his place, "I want you to work tomorrow. How about you?"

There was no answer. They knew he had more to say and waited to hear it.

"You see how we're fixed here," he went on. "Half of the camp up here, half of it back at the old place. If we work tomorrow we'll be all settled here by tomorrow night. You all did the fair thing by the Company by working last night. The Company won't forget that, as you'll see when you get your checks. I'm not asking anybody to work tomorrow who doesn't want to. You've got a right to lay off if you want to, and there won't be any hard feelings toward you if you do. But if you work there'll be an extra day's pay on your checks, at double time. Now how about it? Do enough of you want to work so we can make up a crew big enough to do some good? Those who want to work hold up their hands."

Half of the men, the oldest and best men in the crew, held up their hands at once. One by one others joined them, at the persuasion of the old men, until only a few, including French Jimmy and his friends, failed to give the sign that they were willing to forego one Sunday's rest.

"All right; that's what I expected," said John. "I knew you boys would stand by the Company. All right then; tomorrow we finish the job of moving camp. In the meantime, let's get at the cook-shack as quick as we can so Fatty'll have some place to get our supper. And if it isn't a good one we'll eat him."

The men laughed—for there is always war between lumber-jacks and cooks—and returned good-naturedly to their work as soon as the meal was done. They displayed even more enthusiasm over a speedy erection of the cook-shack than they had displayed over the bunk-house, valuing their meals much higher than their beds.

Nels came stalking into camp and took his place at one of the tables soon after the other men had left. He carried Curly Joe's rifle as well as his own, and without a word he fell to eating. Wolf John studied him carefully.

"Where you been all morning?" he demanded.

"I been looking for signs—up Whisky Falls way," replied Nels quietly.

"See any?"

"Only one set of tracks, coming and going back." Nels gulped a mouthful of hot coffee. "They was Curly Joe's," he added. "I followed 'em to within sight of the Falls. I kind of waited around up there; I thought maybe some one'd be coming this way. If I'd 'a' got out this morning a little earlier I'd 'a' met Curly Joe on his way here, but he was hid down there in the alders before daylight. I'd just hit his track and was trailing him when he cut loose at you. He may be a good shot, that Curly Joe, but he's a —— fool to start shooting then. It was 'way too dark to see the sights."

Wolf John opened his mouth to launch

Digitized by Google

forth a denunciation of Nels for quitting his duties as teamster without leaving word. His eye caught sight of Curly Joe's captured rifle, however, and he desisted. He looked from Nels to the hard-working crew which had agreed to his nephew's request that they work on Sunday, with whisky only a few miles away.

"Ho hum!" he sighed. "I guess the old man's place ain't in the bush any longer. All I'm fit for now is to sit behind a desk and sign checks. But I'm going to stay here until the first tree goes down, even if it puts me in bed to do it."

He did not even put in a word when French Jimmy and two other men demanded and received their time that evening. John gave them their checks with an alacrity that took the wind out of French Jimmy's sails. He started to deal out insult and defiance, but caught Norby's eye on him and desisted. Norby grinned as Jimmy slung his war-bag over his shoulder and slunk off into the woods toward Whisky Falls.

CHAPTER XXII

FRENCH JIMMY STEALS A HORSE

JOHN went back to the old camp and slept in the stables that Saturday night. Since Curly Joe had fired that single shot of the morning he realized that Bart and his gang had started the war to cripple and hinder the start of logging in the King Pines. The feat of moving the camp depended entirely upon horses to haul it from its new site to the old, a fact with which Bart was fully familiar. A night raid of the gang from the Falls on the stables, the destruction of horses, and Bart would have dealt a blow which would seriously impair the chances for success in the new camp.

John unrolled his blankets in the hay-shed and went to sleep where any one entering the stable doors would have to pass within a few yards of his head. He resolved to sleep as little as possible. Having made this resolve, the fatigue incident to being without sleep the night before and of doing two men's work during the day, claimed its own and he went soundly to sleep.

He was awakened by the glare of a light shining in his eyes. Sleepily he rolled over, wondering if he had slept so long that the sun could be shining. No, it couldn't be the sun; the sun didn't jump and flicker like this light. Neither did it crackle, nor bring with it a smell of smoke to the nostrils. Thoroughly awake, John sprang up and located the light. It was a tongue of flame swiftly eating its way through a crack in one corner of the light board hay-shed, and as John watched it a tiny pencil of flame shot out and took hold of the loose inflammable hay.

There was no time to summon men to help. A delay of a few seconds, and the hay would be burning too fiercely to be stopped. John leaped for the corner, stamped out the tiny beginning of the fire and with his hands dragged away the hay from the burning corner. This done he ran out to where the fire had started. To seize a shovel and toss snow on the shed until the flames were dead required only a few seconds.

Then John looked around. The camp slept; there was not a sign or sound that any one had stirred recently. Lighting a match he went down on his knees in the snow and searched for the origin of the fire.

Beneath the snow with which he had stopped the flames he found a charred pitch-pine knot, properly slivered for breaking into a blaze at the touch of a match. Under the light of the full moon the snow lay undisturbed around the shed. The absence of foot-prints puzzled John until in the road which passed within a few yards of the shed he found fresh hoof-marks and the fresh tracks of a cutter. It would have been an easy thing to sit in the cutter, light the prepared pitch-pine and toss it against the wall of the shed.

John followed the cutter tracks until they turned toward Whisky Falls. Returning to camp he searched for tracks to indicate where the cutter had come into camp. To his amazement he retraced the tracks to a spot beyond the stables where the sleighs were wont to stand. He saw that an old cutter was missing and hurried to the stables.

The stable door stood open. Inside in a stall lay old Lavin, the stableman, a cut on the top of his head, a strap in his mouth for a gag, and his legs and arms tied securely in a pair of lines. John freed him and set him on his feet.

"What's happened?" he demanded.

It was some time before the old man could speak.

"All I know is that somebody came to

Digitized by Google

the door and called my name softly," said he. "I opened the door and something took me on the head, and that was all I knew until I came to in the stall there."

Lighting a lantern John bade him see if the horses were all present.

"The dirty dawgs!" cried the old man, as he came to the end of the stalls. "They've stolen little Fanny. By cripes! This has been somebody who knew these stables, Mr. Peabody. They knew Fanny was blind, and it's only a blind horse that will go out in the night in strange hands without whinnying or making any fuss."

John thought the situation over and decided not to say anything about the attempt to fire the hay-shed.

"All right, Lavin," he said. "Come on out and we'll wash that cut of yours and put a little bandage on it. I suppose some of the boys got crazy to go to the Falls and borrowed the horse. I don't want you to say anything about it to anybody. Understand? This is between you and me. We'll handle 'em when they come back with the horse, if it's some of the boys."

John did not sleep any more that night. He lay in the hay-shed and stared sleeplessly into the dark. There was no danger of another fire that night, but the possibilities suggested by this new attack refused to allow him to slumber. If the intent had been merely to fire the stables why had the incendiaries gone to the risk of stealing a company horse? If Lavin was right, and the horse-thieves were familiar with Fanny's blindness and docility, they must have belonged to the camp recently.

Big Charley, Bart, French Jimmy and his two followers were the only men from Main Camp who could be at Whisky Falls unless some of the crew had deserted that night. Big Charley's cowardice would never permit him to attempt such a dangerous enterprise; if Bart had made the attempt personally he would have made it a success and made sure that the hay and stables would burn. That left French Jimmy and his crew. John lay miserably on the hay and wondered if there were any more French Jimmies left among his men.

HIS first act in the morning was to ascertain that all the men were present and fit for work. With the exception of the three men who had quit Saturday night the crew turned out bright and early, every man ready for work after a full night's sleep.

"It's French Jimmy," decided John.

He kept the night's events to himself, and repeated his injunctions to Lavin to say nothing about the assault upon him or the theft of the horse and cutter. Fanny, being a little driver, was not used in the work of moving camp, consequently her absence was not noticed; and John was resolved that the camp should be moved before he even paused to think of other things, such as, for instance, the recovery of a stolen horse.

The weather favored him. The warm spell held, and Sunday dawned mild and clear, the sort of a day when men in the woods doff their mackinaws and heavy mittens and snow-ball one another from sheer excess of high spirits.

"Let's hustle it at the jump, boys," said John, leading the way in the hardest work. "Then we'll be sure of getting moved up there. After that we can take it easy."

The manner in which the men cheerfully tackled the extra day's work assured him that he had no more to fear from traitors like French Jimmy. A few of the men, the ones who had at first expressed themselves against working on Sunday, took hold carelessly at first.

"Oh, well, it's better than the regular Sunday morning hang-over," they said, and presently they were keeping pace with Norby, Whitey Jack and the other men who were working with an eagerness second only to that of John.

By nightfall what remained of Main Camp had been removed to its new site, the walls of the stables were up, the sheds of the blacksmith, the wood-butcher had been begun, and as it then stood the camp was ready for half of the crew to start logging on Monday morning.

"It ain't logging," repeated Whitey Jack for the fiftieth time, "but here we are just the same."

Wolf John took no part in the day's rush. He watched the capable fashion in which the work went on with a tinge of sadness in his old, lined face. He sensed the coming of the new generation, and though he warmed with pride at the thought that the new leader was one of his own kin he did not fail to sense a pang as he realized that his reign was done.

"Is it going all right, Uncle John?" asked John after supper.

Digitized by Google

"Huh! Little need you've got to ask me that," growled the old man. "I can not understand where you got the knack of handling men."

"It's the men themselves," said John. "They're a bunch of bricks. I don't do anything; they give the best that's in 'em, their experience and everything else."

"Exactly. And that's what I said: I don't see where you learned the trick of making men do that without driving. Hear that now. Ah! That's one of the secrets!"

In the bunk-house the men were holding a mock-christening on the new building. Dugan, with a horse-blanket wrapped around him for a dress, and leaning mincingly on Norby's arm, broke a catsup bottle on the door-post, saying in a high falsetto as he did so:

"I christen thee the good ship Bed Bug."

Inside the men were laughing and singing, the guitar was plunking and above the medley rose loudly the calls that had attracted Wolf John's attention.

"Oh ho, Boss John! Oh, Mr. Peabody alias Mud! Yo ho, Jack; give us a little song for the christening. Come on, Boss John."

Laughing heartily John joined the fun-making. The still dread which had been in his heart since his discovery of the attempt to fire the stables vanished. The friendship of the men assured him. What could Bart and Wah Song and their gang do to stop him when he had at his back a crew of men such as these? He ceased to be the watchful, worrying foreman and for the time being became "one of the boys."

"Give us 'Home Sweet Home,' " suggested some one. "That's appropriate to christ'nings. I know; I went to one once and we all sang that."

" 'Home Sweet Home,' " chorused a dozen voices. "Even if Dugan did christen her 'Bed Bug.' "

For an hour the fun-making and singing continued at its height. Then John slipped out. The sentimental songs—the rougher men are the more sentimental are the songs that find their favor—had evoked thoughts of Belle, and he wished to be alone with his memories, his feelings and his hopes. The road leading back to Main Camp's site found favor with him, possibly because it ran also to Peabody Point, and under the light of the full moon he wandered away from the noise of the camp into the silent woods.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE WAY OF WAH SONG

OUT in the pines he stopped and leaned against the trunk of a tree. It was in the few minutes of perfect quiet following the coming of darkness, and in the woods not a bough moved. So still was it that John heard the faint tinkle of sleighbells down the road fully a mile away. He listened carefully and heard that the bells were coming toward him at a good pace.

Caution prompted him to step into the dark shadow of a tree and watch the road. Soon the sleigh appeared, and in the moonlight John recognized the cutter and horse driven by a pale little clerk from the office at Peabody Point.

"Hello," called John, stepping into the road. "What's the hurry?"

The clerk pulled up nervously.

"Oh hello, Mud—Mr. Peabody, I mean," he gasped in relief. "Well, how is he?"

"How is who?"

A shade of surprise flickered on the clerk's pale face.

"The old man—Wolf John. Is he pretty bad?"

It was John's turn to betray surprise.

"Let's get this straight," he said. "Is anything supposed to be the matter with my Uncle John?"

Now the clerk was frankly amazed.

"Anything the matter with him?" he said slowly. "Well, I should say so. He had an attack of heart failure this morning, didn't he?"

John stood staring at the little clerk as if he did not understand.

"Who told you that?" he said suddenly.

"Why, the man you sent down after Miss Belle, of course."

A sudden, killing chill seemed suddenly to reach in and freeze John's heart in his breast. A sickening sensation smote him in the pit of the stomach, and his knees felt weak and powerless. He stood like a man turned to stone.

"Good God!" he cried. "What are you talking about, man? Miss Peabody, Belle—a man I sent after her?"

The clerk looked dumfounded.

"Isn't she here?" he asked lamely. "Where's Wolf John?"

Then the ice in John's veins turned to fire. He seized the little man by the breast

Digitized by Google

of his mackinaw and forcibly dragged him from the sleigh.

"No, Miss Belle isn't here," he snarled, as if the clerk were responsible for her absence. "Wolf John is in camp, in the cook-shack. There isn't anything the matter with him; he didn't have any attack of heart failure; I didn't send any man down after Miss Belle. Speak, man; speak out! What are you telling me?"

The little man writhed painfully in his fierce grasp.

"Don't—don't shake me to pieces, Mr. Peabody," he chattered. "I ain't to blame. I didn't have anything to do with it. One of the men came driving a sweating horse down to the Point about 3:30, and said Wolf John had had a stroke up here and that you'd said for Miss Belle to jump right in and come up as fast as the horse could go. That's all I know about it. I didn't have anything to do in the office, so I started about half an hour later to see if there was anything I could do."

"And Belle—she went with the man?"

"Sure. Why shouldn't she? It was French Jimmy. She knew him; he had one of the company's drivers—that blind Fanny—and he said he came from you. Didn't she—didn't she get here at all, Mr. Peabody?"

John leaned against the horse and groaned.

"Good God, no! She didn't get here. French Jimmy has gone over to the gang at the Falls, and he stole that horse."

The clerk began to tremble.

"Mr. Peabody — they haven't — they haven't——" His mouth remained open, but the dread words refused to come.

Overhead the early night wind began to stir the pines into their soothing murmur. John stood still and silent. The camp, the pines, his uncle, the fight against Lowrey's gang, the fight to make good, the fight for success—life itself—all had faded in a moment to total insignificance. What did they matter now? What did they mean to him?

In a moment he understood that these things to him now were as naught; that the question of Belle's danger outweighed them so completely that life for him just then had but one aim. To get to Belle's side; to find her, to get her out of danger. That was what he had to do now; that was all he had to think of. He saw it clearly. The understanding gave him a sudden new strength and determination.

"Look here, son," he said suddenly to the clerk, "you're not to say a word about this to anybody else. Understand? You're to keep it quiet. Can you stand to turn right around and drive back to the Point without your supper? You're man enough for that aren't you?"

The clerk swelled with pride and stammered—

"Sure thing."

"Fine! I knew you could. That's all; just get back to the Point without letting a soul know that Belle's missing. If Wolf John knew it now he'd—well, he mustn't know unless we've got to tell him. Got that straight? All right. Now go!"

ALONE, John turned his face up toward the murmuring pines, and his clenched fists raised themselves in a movement half curse, half prayer. Against the rising moonlight the pine boughs murmured serenely; his head bowed and he stood irresolute. The still spell of early evening was upon the forest, and the world seemed empty.

The camp and the men at his back John had forgotten. His reasoning powers seemed frozen. Belle was some place in the woods—in danger! Nothing else in the world existed for him; nothing moved him but the desire—nay, the need to go forth and seek her.

It was not reason that sent him lunging blindly into the black woods alone, when there were a hundred men at his back ready to comb the woods with him until she was found. It was not reason that set his hurrying feet unerringly through the timber to the river trail to Whisky Falls. What could one man do against the gang up there, one man with his bare hands? It was not reason, it was instinct that drove him. It was the new, great need that had sprung up in his heart, and the need was as deep and inevitable as the song of the pines when the eternal winds stir them.

He went at a pace that was little short of a run. He had no plan. He knew that French Jimmy had been acting for the gang at the Falls; that Belle had been deceived into entering the cutter and had been driven away somewhere by the gang. That even such a gang, led by Bart and Wah Song, would dare to do her harm he did not for a

Digitized by Google

moment believe; for at the word that Belle, the idol of the Point, had been harmed, Bart and his minions knew that two hundred men would be out combing the timber to wipe them off the earth, no matter what the cost.

No, they wouldn't dare to hurt her; they would keep her as hostage, hidden some place near by. Where this hiding-place might be John could not imagine. In fact, he did not stop long to ponder over it.

From Whisky Falls the arm had reached forth that had snatched Belle away. At Whisky Falls were the men who had planned and performed the kidnapping; and there was where the men who knew of Belle's whereabouts were to be found. Very well, he would go to Whisky Falls and choke the knowledge out of them. No thought of what a foolhardy thing it was to attempt; no realization that at Whisky Falls his life would be worth only the price of one cartridge.

His instinct told him to go on. It lifted him above himself, and it deprived him of caution or reason. He was within sight of the very lights of the place, was breaking into a run that would carry him in through the door of Wah Song's place, where Bart probably was to be found, when a shivering woman stepped into the road before him and he stopped.

"I thought you'd be coming—some of you—when you found out," she said, and John recognized the voice of the woman whom he had picked up in the snow on Christmas Eve. "I been waiting for you till I'm near froze. I'd 'a' gone down to your camp if you hadn't come; I would, so help me God, though they'd killed me for it."

"Belle—Miss Peabody—do you know where she is?" interrupted John.

"Yes, yes. But don't holler, don't talk so loud." The woman drew him back in the shadow of the ledge where she had been waiting. "I know; I know where she is. But Bart didn't do it. Believe that, Mister; I swear it by my lost soul. Bart didn't do it; he wouldn't 'a' done it. It was Wah Song. You gotta believe that. You mustn't hold Bart responsible."

"Where is she?" demanded John impatiently.

"Will you believe what I say?" insisted the woman. "Will you remember it wasn't Bart? If you don't, I swear I won't tell you where she is."

"You swear it wasn't Bart?"

She looked up at him appealingly.

"It wasn't—I swear it!"

"All right. I believe you. Now where is she?"

"In a little shanty on the big bayou just around the bend of the river, about a mile down there," she said pointing. "I heard Wah Song telling French Jimmy where to take her. The shanty's built under a ledge of rocks; you can't see it until you're almost on it. Go down the river till you come to the mouth of the bayou, then follow the left bank till you come to the ledge."

She caught hold of his arm as he started away without a word.

"You'll remember that it wasn't Bart?" she said swiftly.

"Yes, yes." Then he suddenly realized the ingratitude he was displaying toward the woman, and paused.

"You—you know you've done something awful fine," he said. "If there's anything I can do to square it with you ever——"

"You did it," she whispered, as she prepared to slink back to the Falls. "You did it, Christmas Eve, when you treated me just like any other woman—after you knew."

JOHN leaped down the bank on to the smooth snow covering of the river ice and ran as swiftly as he could for the bend which the woman had indicated. The moon was up above the timber-line, and on the white ribbon of snow down which he raced he saw another set of tracks where some one had gone before him. He paused a moment to examine them. The tracks were new, had been made within an hour, and were made by a man running at top speed in the same direction as himself.

John ran faster. As he reached the big bend he saw that the tracks curved toward the farther bank. Breathless, he followed them and they led him straight to the mouth of the bayou of which the woman had spoken. Here there were other tracks. John saw that two men at least had gone up the bayou, one certainly had come back, and his heart leaped as he saw beside the larger footprints the small marks of Belle's moccasins. The woman from Whisky Falls had told the truth; she was up there some place on the bayou: there were no small tracks coming back.

Digitized by Google

The bayou, a long narrow bay, ran upstream behind the ridge that marked the river bank, almost parallel with the course of the stream. It was as dark as the Pit. Tall pines lined it on one side; on the other a dense swamp of tamaracks shut out the light from the rising moon. The snow on the ice alone was visible and John ran on, hugging the left bank.

The smooth expanse of snow seemed to end abruptly before him. There was no ledge of rocks, no shanty! Only pine and tamarack, desolate and silent. The hope and confidence in his heart faltered and gave place to chilling fear. He had been tricked; he had been sent on a wild-goose chase; he——

"Bang!" went a faint shot almost, it seemed, at his shoulder.

John swung around. The sound of the shot had barely reached him, and yet it sounded close by, as if it were muffled. John sprang in the direction whence it came. Then he saw the narrow opening in the tamaracks where the bayou slipped through, sprang through it and found himself in the main part of the bay, a large, lake-like surface where the rays of the moon reached in and made all things light. At his left was the ledge of rocks, and in a crevice, hidden, all save its narrow front wall, was a tiny cabin, and to one side of the cabin's board door was the dark form of a man.

"You —— little fool, you!" roared the man, and it was Bart's voice. "Don't shoot at me. I want to let you out. I didn't do this; it was that fool, Wah Song. He just told me. I've come here to let you get out and go home."

"Bang!" came a second muffled shot, and a second splinter flew off the board door. John's heart leaped exultantly. He understood the scene now. Belle was in there, but she had something to shoot with and was safe.

"Keep away, Bart." From the inside of the cabin Belle's voice came faintly but with an indomitable ring in it. "Keep away from the door. Try to open it and—I won't miss you."

John leaped forward madly.

"Belle, Belle!" he cried without realizing what he said. "It's all right, it's all right. I've found you—I've found you!"

A snarl and a curse as Bart swung around. Then to John it seemed that the ice had risen and smitten him in the back of the head, and he was conscious that he was on his back hugging something hard and hairy with a grip as if clinging to life itself.

A second or two and his senses cleared sufficiently to realize that it was Bart's head that he held in chancery. So swiftly had the foreman flung himself forward that John had neither time to see nor guard. Instinctively he had clamped his big arms upon the first thing that offered; so now the two of them rolled and thrashed in the snow on the ice, Bart's fists flailing murderously for John's head, his body writhing and leaping like a bobcat's to free itself from the grip that had made Big Charley cry, "Enough!"

"It's all right, Belle!" panted John. "It's all right."

"Is it?" hissed Bart.

A wrench and his body bent almost double, one knee found a resting-spot on John's body, and he tore himself free.

"Is it?" he cried triumphantly as his other knee found John's stomach, his left hand reached for a throat-hold and his right fist aimed a blow at the face below him.

John writhed to one side, partly avoided the blow, flung his arms up, caught a hold around Bart's hips, and brought him down into the snow again. Within the cabin John heard Belle pounding on the door.

"Unbar the door!" she begged. "Oh, unbar the door. It's barred on the outside. Let me get out; I—I want to help you."

John spat out a mouthful of blood.

"It's all right," he managed to gasp. "Don't worry."

HE KNEW he was beaten. He realized it the moment when Bart had broken the head hold. The body which he gripped was like a body of supple steel, no yielding, no soft places to clamp on a grip, but steel-like muscles everywhere, flowing beneath his arms irresistibly.

Let Bart but get free long enough to land one blow from his terrible fists and the fight would be over. And get free he would soon; John knew he could not hold him. He felt himself weakening, while the terrible struggle seemed not even to have made Bart breathe more rapidly. The ex-foreman's curses rang steadily in his ear. His fists tried incessantly to reach his head.

Then suddenly both curses and blows stopped. Through the roaring blood that

Digitized by Google

was pounding in his temples John heard as if far away six faint pops in rapid succession. Also a sound of something ripping. His dimming senses recognized the sounds: that was the way that first shot had sounded in the cabin.

"Oh, John, John!" Belle's voice, far away, but somehow much clearer than before. "I can get out. Wait—wait till I shoot this hole a little larger and I can reach the bar outside. I'm coming!"

"—— you!" Bart cursed and tore to free himself, only to free himself. He ceased to strike. "You got to have help from a woman, you pup!"

One, two, three, four more shots and the noise of ripping boards. A glad cry from within the cabin; the sound of a board falling on the hard ground. Bart tore himself free and disappeared with great bounds into the darkness of the timber as Belle thrust open the cabin door and sprang out into the moonlight, revolver in hand.

John staggered to his feet.

"It's all right, Belle — Miss Peabody. You're—not hurt?"

"I? Of course not. Where's Bart—where did he go? Oh! You're hurt, John!"

"Thank God you're all right!" he said weakly. "Then everything is—all right."

Down in the snow dropped the revolver from her hand as she saw his cut and bleeding face.

"Oh, oh!" She swayed, her hands clasping her bosom, the strength of the moment before vanishing in a flutter of feminine tenderness. She ran to him, scooping handfuls of snow and pressing it to his wounds.

"Hold it there," she said as she reached for fresh snow. "It's stopping, isn't it? You're not badly hurt, are you?"

"Why—why I'm all right," protested John. "It's—it's you; are you—all right?"

"Yes, yes. But your face—John. Here's more snow. Are you hurt any place else? Oh, are you? Please tell me."

She ministered to him, entirely forgetful of herself, brave and shuddering by turns, sometimes half-laughing, again near to sobs. The cold snow soon checked the flow of blood. With more snow she washed from his face the red traces of the fight in spite of his attempts to stop her. In the moon's rising light she tore her handkerchief and his into strips and bound up his forehead and jaw where he was hurt. Then, when he was properly bandaged, for the first time did she seem to think of herself and her recent captivity.

"How in the world did you find me?" she gasped. "How did you know of this place?"

John told her in a few words how the clerk had brought the news, how he had met the woman from Whisky Falls and had been directed to the shanty. Then Belle related how she had been tricked into coming to the shanty on the bayou.

"I didn't have a shade of doubt that everything was all right when French Jimmy came driving up to the house and told me you'd sent for me to come," she said. "How could I? I'd been fearing that I'd hear some such news ever since you told me about Uncle John. I didn't suspect a thing, and I slipped the revolver and cartridge belt under my sweater simply because I never go into the woods without them.

"French Jimmy said Uncle John was at the new camp, but just the other side of where Main Camp used to be a man met us in the road and said we were to come here; that you had started to drive down the river with Uncle and that he'd got so bad that you had to stop and place him in this shanty.

"Then French Jimmy swung up the river and we came here. It was pitch dark when we got here. The door of the shanty was open, and there were two or three men standing outside. I couldn't see who they were, but one of them said:

"'He's inside there; hurry up if you want to see him alive.' Well, I ran in, frantic, and then they slammed the door shut and dropped the bar and went away. If I'd known where the bar was I would have shot a hole in the door right away, but I didn't know until Bart came down just now and started to raise the bar. He got here just a minute before you did—and then you came and everything was all right," she concluded.

"Yes, thanks to your getting out," said John, abashed.

"And Uncle John?" she cried.

"Is just as well as when you saw him last. He's safe and sound over at the camp. He doesn't know a thing about this."

"Then I'm glad; then I haven't any hard feelings against the gang at all," she said happily. "They wouldn't have dared to hurt me, anyhow, you know. I had my revolver; they couldn't have hurt me. But

Digitized by Google

what was their idea? Was it Bart's way of taking revenge on Uncle John?"

John told her what the woman from the Falls had told him.

"I really believe it wasn't Bart at all," he said. "You heard him say that as soon as he heard of it he raced down here to set you free. I believe it was Wah Song. Doesn't look like a white man's trick—not up here in the woods. But I suppose Wah Song had some Chinese idea of holding you as hostage. Anyhow, he knew the camp would be deserted while we hunted for you. Perhaps he had some idea of putting the camp out of business while we were out looking for you. I don't know; I don't care now. The thing to do now is to get you safely away from here before Bart and his gang might come back."

Belle quickly picked up the revolver, carefully wiped the snow off it and slipped in four fresh cartridges from the belt beneath her sweater.

"There's no danger for me," she said quietly, placing the weapon in its holster. "But you must hurry and get to where you can dress your hurts carefully. You mustn't be out in the cold any longer than you can help. I'll go with you to camp."

THEY were hurrying down the dark bayou toward the river. John winced at each reference to his hurts, he remembered how Bart had dealt them to him, and that Belle knew that Bart was the better man.

"Uncle John is at camp," he said, halting as they emerged from the narrow bayou on to the white, moonlit space of the river. "He doesn't know a thing about this affair. I kept it from him. If you go to camp now at this time of night, how are we going to explain it? It wouldn't be good for him to know about this."

They stood looking at each other, with the eternal silence of the forest about them, the light of the moon upon their eyes.

"We'd better go over toward camp. Then you can wait for me near by while I run in to the stables and get a rig and drive you down to the Point."

"No need at all for that," she said quickly. "I can take the river straight down for about two miles. That brings me to the tote-road about a mile below where Main Camp used to be. From there it isn't over five miles home—only seven miles in all."

"You don't mean you intend to walk it—after what you've gone through?"

"Walk it?" She rose to her tiptoes in the buoyant manner which he had come to know so well. "Why, I feel as if I could run all the way. Really, I won't have you trouble about a rig. You would have to drive me in, and they'd notice your absence and ask questions. No; I'll walk it. I'll be home in two hours."

"If you do," said John, "I'll walk with you."

She looked up seriously.

"No. You're needed at the camp; you know you hadn't ought to be away a minute longer than necessary. As for my going alone——"

She paused, and with her head on one side she listened to the murmur of the pines on the river bank.

"Hear that? Do you think I'm afraid while I hear the pines singing? They make me feel safe, make me feel at home, you know. They're my friends. And I'm not afraid of Bart. Are you?"

"Come on," he said sharply, and led the way down the river.

She laughed a little as she walked easily at his side.

"You remind me of Uncle John when you talk that way," she said. "Short and commanding; nothing for little me left but to obey humbly."

He walked on without replying. After a while she took hold of the sleeve of his mackinaw lightly. "Cousin John, I've been wondering: where were you going when you met—that woman?"

He replied gruffly that he was going up to the Falls.

"And what were you going to do there?"

"Make them tell me where you were," he said.

"Alone?"

He hesitated.

"I didn't stop to think of that; it was a foolish thing. It was luck that helped me. Nothing but fool's luck."

She did not speak again until they were in the tote-road leading down to the Point. The crunch of their steps on the snow were the only sounds that disturbed the silence as they walked along. When they stopped in the road she held out her hand.

"I like your kind of fool's luck, Cousin John," she said, and then she was gone, and John was left staring down the road after her.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XXIV

"GOOD LUCK!"

"RO-OLL out! Daylight in the swamp, lumber-jacks. Ro-o-o-oll out!"

It was Monday morning, and Dugan, proud of the fact that it was his lot to announce the coming of the day for starting work in the King Pines, put such extra energy into his waking-call that the soundest sleeper in the bunk-house sat up with a start.

As the men tumbled sleepily out into the open air they shivered and yelled when the cold nipped them. The warm spell had gone. Over night the wind had blown steadily from the north, bringing down the regular January cold spell which had been expected, "three-shirt weather," as the lumber-jacks called it.

"Perfect logging weather," snapped Wolf John as he arose. "Start your sprinkling-cart going on what road's ready. Put in a crew to finish the stretch down to the river. Keep the carts going all night tonight, and we'll have ice-roads by tomorrow morning."

John watched the crew of men come piling out of the cook-shack after breakfast, buttoning mackinaws, slipping on mittens, picking up saws, axes and wedges, and he knew that his test was before him. All that had gone before was incidental. Now the long grind began. Could he handle this big crew of rough men through the long siege of work that was beginning? Would he assay gold in the severe test of being boss alone in the woods at the head of four-score capable men? Or would he prove to be "Mud," after all?

He knew that if the latter were the case these men of the woods would know it before a week had passed. After that there would be nothing for him to do but to pack his war-bag and hie himself out of the woods.

If he could run the crew all right, if he could win the men to him and hold their respect as he now held it, through the test that was coming, he had no fear that Bart, Wah Song, French Jimmy, or any of Lowrey's forces would be able to prevent him from making the King Pines job a success. Bart had driven the camp by the sheer force and dominance that was in him; his every act had announced that he neither needed nor desired the coöperation or friendship of any of the men. They had been the cogs in the machine; Bart the motive power.

John realized that because of his inexperience, if for no other reason, such a course was closed to him, even if he had desired to follow. He had done what he had done simply because the great majority of the men were his friends. They had become his friends before they had known that he was to become their boss. He had one chance to win: that was to keep the friendship and respect of the men, and to do that he must show them that he was a proper boss.

Was it in him? Could he do it? He thought of Belle and vowed that he could —he would!

He laid his hand on the crew the minute that breakfast was over.

"You fellows—" he called a dozen men by name—"you work under Norby getting the buildings finished."

Another dozen were told off, under Brackett, who would have no top-loading to do until hauling commenced, to complete the work of clearing a road to the river. The rest of the crew, with the exception of the camp-men, he led promptly into the woods and had them at the spot where the logging was to begin, at the point in the Pines farthest from the river, as daylight appeared. The crew, close to fifty men in all, was scattered on both sides of the new-made road, each pair of sawyers far enough from their neighbors to prevent any interference or danger from falling trees.

"Let her go!" shouted John at the top of his voice and instantly twenty saws rasped into as many big pines, each pair of sawyers striving eagerly for the honor of felling the first.

From his place in the cutter beside Nels, Wolf John watched with the light flaming in his old eyes as the *whish-whish, whish-which* of speeding saws filled the woods.

Presently near the road there came simultaneously from three pairs of throats the triumphant, "Look out!" Three saws clanged as they were hastily withdrawn from the cuts they had made; and three great trees wavered slightly, leaned over, and presently, *"Who-o-osshh! Boom!"* their trunks roared as they struck the ground.

"First timber!" claimed three pairs of voices again; and without any more delay the sawyers leaped forward, measured off

Digitized by Google

the first cut, and instantly the saws were ripping their way through the prostrate trunks.

"First saw-log!" triumphantly announced the pair nearest the road as they completed the first cut some seconds ahead of their rivals. Then it was *"Whoo-oosshh—Boom!"* every few seconds as other trees announced that they were on the way to become lumber, and the day's work was on in earnest.

Wolf John turned away from the scene of activity with something like a sigh.

"Well, we've seen the beginning of the job even if we don't see the end," he said. "Take me back to Home Camp, Nels. I'm through in the woods. I'm only fit to stay at home and sign checks and have little Belle make a fuss over me. Go ahead."

But before they drove away John managed to whisper a few words in Nels' ear. So Nels as he drove his master toward Peabody Point that morning recalled over and over again that he had been particularly ordered to see Belle Peabody with his own eyes and to ask her if there was, perchance, any word to carry to the new boss.

John looked at his watch as the cutter went out of sight. It was near to seven-thirty. Nels would probably stay at the Point for lunch. By starting back immediately after noon he should be back in camp by three. Until then John knew he would be on tenter-hooks, for, in spite of the energy with which he had thrown himself into the work of getting the crews started, there had not been a moment since Sunday evening when he had not been troubled by the question: Did Belle reach home in safety?

AT THREE-THIRTY in the afternoon he grew impatient and returned to camp. Nels had not appeared. John hurried down to where Brackett and his crew were completing the stretch of road toward the river and spent an hour with them before returning to camp. It was four-thirty then, and still no Nels came.

Darkness fell. The men came trooping in from the timber, buildings gleamed with light, lanterns flickered about the stables; the first day in King Pines had passed successfully—but Nels did not come.

The men trooped in to supper, finished their meal, lounged into the bunk-house, lighted their pipes, played cards, yawned, knocked out pipes, put away cards, dimmed the lights and went to their bunks. The camp grew dark and still. John was the only one who had not gone to rest, and he paced restlessly in his little office, regularly stepping out into the biting cold to listen for any sign of Nels' coming, and growing more worried with each time that he listened in vain.

It was midnight when Nels came driving in. John, waiting for him at the stable door, fought and controlled the feelings that were troubling him, and greeted him with a casual, "Well?"

Nels stepped stiffly from the sleigh, stamped about and beat his hands together without replying. Though his hands trembled, John lighted the stable-lantern hanging near the wall and held it up to the little man's face.

"What is it?" he demanded. Then he changed to, "Put the horse in and we'll go into the office where it's warm."

In the little office Nels took the mittens from his cold hands, opened his mackinaw and from the pocket of his shirt handed John a slip of paper. John hurriedly read the few lines of hastily scribbled writing:

> Nels will tell you what's happened. Uncle John sends you this word: "Don't bother about me; get out the logs." Good luck. BELLE.

John turned his eyes from the paper to Nels. The old man had seated himself and was looking hard at the floor.

"Well?" said John. "What's happened?"

Nels slowly pulled at his frozen mustache.

"Well," he said, "I guess they've got old Wolf John."

"What!"

"Bart came down to the Point—to the office—just after me'n the old man drove in," continued Nels. "He come down to get his pay. He walked right in—you've got to admit that the devil has the bones of a man in him."

"Go on—go on! For God's sake, what happened?"

"It was a funny thing." Nels shook his head as if still puzzling about the scene he was describing. "The old man was sitting at his desk and Bart steps in and closes the door—you know that way he's got of being some place without you seeing him move. Well, the old man looked up and see him standing there, and for a minute they just looked at each other.

Digitized by Google

" 'Good morning, Wolf John,' says Bart. 'I've come after my check.'

"The old man don't answer right away. 'Bart,' he says after a while, 'I should think you'd be afraid to try it.'

"Bart smiled a little. 'Afraid?' he says. 'It's a long time since I was afraid of anything, Wolf John.'

" 'And it's a long time since any man dared face me in my own office after giving me lip in my own camp,' the old man said.

" 'I dare,' says Bart. 'You see me here, don't you?'

"The old man looks him over careful. 'How's your gunman, Curly Joe?' he says. 'Did you forget Nels when you sent him down to lay for me?'

" 'Curly Joe needs no sending by me,' says Bart. 'His grudge against you is a killing grudge without anybody urging him on.'

"I cut in then. 'I'm shooting a little better than usual, Bull Bart,' I says, 'and I'd just as leave pull trigger with the sights on the left breast of your mackinaw as on the fore part of a buck,' I says.

" 'Shut up,' says the old man to me. 'What have you come here for, Bart? It isn't merely for your check; you wouldn't run chances like this for that. Spit it out, man; I've got no pleasure in laying eyes on you.'

" 'It's this,' says Bart. 'I come down here because I want you to know that I'm a white man, and when I fight I fight white-man's fashion, and I did not have anything to do with kidnapping Belle, and that as soon as Wah Song told me I smashed his face and went out to send her safe back home.'

"The old man's face turns kind of gray as he hears this, and his mouth stays open and he gasps kind of like a fish out of water.

"When he speaks it's just a whisper of his old self.

" 'Belle?' he says. 'Kidnapped—Belle?'

"Bart was surprised himself at this. Then he laughs. 'Oh, ho. You haven't heard about it, eh?' he says. 'Yes, yes; Belle was kidnapped Sunday, by Wah Song's orders. The fool thought he'd do me a favor, thought I'd keep her hidden on you and make you quit on the King Pines to get her back.' He leaned over toward the old man. 'Wolf John,' he says, 'I don't need to go stealing women, and I don't need to fight with 'em. I come to tell you that I'm going to break up your camp in the Pines without any yellow tricks like that. Now, give me my check!'

"The old man kept kind of gagging in his throat as if he was trying to say something and couldn't. 'Belle!' he kind of gasps, as if that was all he could think of. 'She's all right, I tell you,' says Bart. 'Yes, came home all right Sunday night,' says one of the boys in the office.

"Wolf John he starts to rise in his chair like something was pulling him up, and he clenched his fist and raised it to Bart, and then all of a sudden he grunts kind of and clutched at his left side, and down he slides into his chair and would have gone to the floor if the clerk hadn't caught him.

"Bart he kind of started to smile until he saw that my six-gun was pointing straight at his belly. 'You're closer to being dead meat right now than you ever were in your life, Bull Bart,' I says. 'Don't you so much as wiggle a finger. You pray for the old man to come to. If he don't you die right where you stand.' "

Nels paused and shook his head.

"He's a man, that devil, even if he is all wrong. He gave me eye for eye and saw that I meant it, and yet he stands right there without turning color or moving an eye, as easy as if the whole thing was play to him. I don't know how long I sat there with the gun on him. I didn't take my eyes off him, didn't look at the old man. 'Is he alive?' I says. 'I don't know,' says the boys. 'Start praying, Bart,' I said. He just smiled.

"WELL, the boys run around and did what was needed—they knew what to do—and then they telephoned for the doctor, and by the time he come, one of the boys says, 'He's coming to.'

" 'Is he going to live?' I says to the doctor. He said he was, but that we'd have to get him up the hill to bed. 'Bart,' I says, 'there's a lot of room in these woods. You go out and help yourself to your share of it, and stay there. Because next time you and I see each other it's only a question of who shoots first, and I can beat you at that with one hand tied behind me. The door's behind you—hike!'

"Bart, he smiled again and looked at the old man down on the floor. 'Well,' he said, 'that saves me a lot of trouble. That leaves only that young fool, Mud, to run the

Digitized by Google

camp,' he says. 'I'll sew up the job before he knows what's happening.' 'Hike,' I said. He went to the door and stood and looked back. 'Tell Mud there's a Company horse and cutter up at the Falls,' he says. 'Maybe he wants to come up after 'em.' Then he went. He was laughing."

"What of Wolf John?" demanded John impatiently.

"Well, we fixed him up on a blanket and carried him up to the house and put him to bed. Miss Belle she turned white, but never a whimper out of her when she saw him. She saw to him. He opened his eyes just as soon as he felt her hand on his forehead— By Heavens! John, if the boys knew about Miss Belle being kidnapped they'd walk over to Whisky Falls tonight and lynch Wah Song and every mother's son that had a hand in it."

"I know it," said John. "That's why you're going to keep your mouth shut. The boys are paid for getting out saw-logs, not for getting shot up at a lynching-bee. Go on; how did Wolf John make out?"

"Oh, fairly, fairly, considering that he'd dropped like a dead man. The doctor gave Miss Belle his orders, short and sweet. Stay in bed and rest, perfectly quiet, do nothing, worry about nothing, take his medicine, and obey orders, and he'll last for a spell. Get up and try to do anything and he'll have another stroke, and that's his finish. I stayed as long as I could, and he came to pretty good just before I left. He sent a few words to you, I understand?"

John read aloud Wolf John's message in Belle's note.

Nels nodded.

"I had a long talk with Miss Belle alone up at the house," he said. He looked sideways at John. "So you mixed with Bull Bart, eh? Yes; Miss Belle told me about Sunday evening over at that shanty. Why in the devil did you go alone? And not a piece of shooting-iron on you. Tomorrow you begin packing one of my six-guns. You will, or I'll take it that you've got the swell-head too much to take advice from old Nels."

"You know better than that," said John.

"All right then. Tomorrow I'll begin showing you a few tricks about six-guns. I noticed the butt of Bart's under his pants' band, but he didn't have a chance to get his hand near it. You've got to have the jump on that black devil if you want an even break. How in the devil did they get that mare and cutter?"

John confided the story of the raid on the stable on Saturday night.

"Why did you say nothing about it?" asked Nels in surprise.

"For the same reason that I said nothing of their fooling Miss Belle into that shanty," replied John. "For the same reason that we aren't going to bother getting that horse back for yet awhile. My job here is to get the logs out, and I'm not going to let anything stop or interfere with that job if I can help it. I don't want the men to get to thinking of anything else. That's why you're not to say a word about Miss Belle, about Wolf John, about the stables, about Bart, about anything that would interfere at all with keeping the crew working like a machine. Nels nodded.

"I see the idea. But Bart—you can bet that he'll make it his business to interfere, and that in mighty short order."

"When that comes," said John, "we'll try to take care of it. In the meantime, I think I'll put somebody else on the tote-team. The job for you from now on will be to spend your days hunting in the Pines up toward Whisky Falls—as you were doing Saturday. And nights there'll be a bunk rigged up for you close to the hay."

Nels wrinkled his old face into a colossal wink of great satisfaction.

"Jest what I was thinking," he said. "Though I don't suspect there'll be much hunting up that way for a while—not till Curly Joe's arm gets well, anyhow."

After Nels had gone John sat alone in the little office until the fire in the stove died out and the chill of the room woke him from his reveries. He was alone now. Wolf John was out of it. It was Bart and himself to a finish. Bart had beaten him in their fight. Could he make good his threat and "sew up the job?" Before he blew out the lantern and sought his bunk John reread Belle's note. He felt better as he saw the two last words—"Good luck!"

CHAPTER XXV

BART PLAYS A TRUMP

THE next day came and went, and the next and the next without sign or hint of interference from Bart. From daylight to dark the King Pines rang with the noise

Digitized by Google

of their destruction. Norby and his crew had completed the erection of the camp buildings. Brackett's gang were through with the work of building a road. The complete crew now was in the woods, sawing and skidding, and there being little or no swamping required, the log piles at the skid-ways along the road grew with unprecedented rapidity.

At night the sprinkling-tank moved up and down the newly made road, the water freezing almost as soon as it struck the snow. By the third morning a narrow ribbon of solid gray ice divided the Pines in two parts, and the road by which the giant sleigh-loads of logs were to slip to their berth on the ice of the Brulé was ready.

The haul was short, the road sloped gently toward the river, and once a load was started, no matter how high Brackett piled the top, it did not stop until it swung up to the roll-ways on the river bank ready for unloading. Then the chains were taken off, gingerly the cant-hooks worked out a bottom log and, *boom-boom-boom!* Like a volley of cannon shots the logs went rolling down the bank, leaping and tumbling far out upon the solid, snow-covered ice.

By the night of the third day a single row of logs five deep spanned the river from bank to bank. By making a hurried survey of the area cleared each day and of the total area of the Pines John estimated that the job should be completed and the logs lying on the ice waiting for the thaw to start them downstream before the middle of March—if Bart did not successfully interfere.

On Friday the young teamster who had been put on the tote-team in Nels' place came driving into camp just after dark, singing and howling in a manner to make the bobcats silent with envy. Whoopingly he pulled his sweating team up with a flourish, tumbled lightly to the ground and offered to fight any blankety-blank-blank man in camp.

"I'm bes' man'n camp!" he announced seriously. "Where'sh yer fight'n' man? Eh? Bring'm out. Bring 'm out, I shay. I'm bes' man'n B-b-brulé ri'er. Don' b'lieve me? Here; take drink; that'll prove it. Hey! Whass matter, whass matter?"

The bottle was wrenched from his hand and smashed on the sleigh before his dulled senses could comprehend what was happening. The drunken leap which he made at his assailant was met with a straight blow in the chest which sent him stumbling to a seat in the snow.

"Whass matter?" he demanded, rising. "Think you c'n break my bot— Oh, h'llo, Boss; didn' rec'nize you."

He tried to slink off, but John's hand caught him by the shoulder and held and shook him.

"Where did you get it?" demanded John. "Out with it: where did you get that whisky?"

"Oh, frien' o' mine," hiccuped the youngster. "Frien' o' mine gave't to me. 'Charley,' he says, 'you're a good feller; I'm good feller. Have drink, Charley,' s'he. Frien' o' mine."

"Where?"

"Oh, down road a piece. Nice feller. Out hunt'n'. Ga' me, bottle. Shay, Boss, can't I have bottle? Eh?"

John saw that the lad was too drunk to be questioned, and directing another man to take care of the team he walked away.

IN THE morning it was a very sick, very repentant young teamster, in strange contrast to the howling bad-man of the night before who stood in John's office and looked at the floor. He was little more than a boy, wherefore his shame was very black, and he was unaccustomed to drinking, wherefore he was very ill.

"You know the rules," said John. "Anybody caught bringing whisky into camp gets his time."

The boy nodded without raising his eyes.

"I'll break that rule for you just once," John continued, "on one condition."

The boy looked up hopefully.

"Where and how did you get the whisky?"

"That was right what I told you last night, boss," stammered the guilty one. "A fellow hit me for a ride down the road, just below where we used to branch off for Main Camp. He gave me that booze."

"Who was he?"

"I don't know. Never saw him before. He was out hunting."

"Where was he going?"

"Up to the Falls. He—he said he was staying up there."

"And you didn't know him—don't know anything more about it than that?"

The boy shuffled nervously.

Digitized by Google

"I got stewed after a couple drinks; that's all I remember."

"Well, you've lost your job as tote-teamster," said John, "but you can go out and be brush-monkey if you want to behave. If you don't, if you think you'd rather have booze than your job, you can have your time now. Which shall it be?"

"I want to keep my job," came the grateful answer. "I never would have touched the stuff if he hadn't handed it to me when I was cold."

"All right, son," said John, kindly. "Get out and get on the job. Keep away from the booze. There's lots of things more fun in than monkeying with that stuff."

The boy departed, shakily but speedily, and John turned his attention to straightening up the camp accounts for the week. He worked an hour on his records, then hurried out to make the rounds among the men. The crew was by this time scattered through the woods in a rough line extending a mile and a half on either side of the camp. Thus it was impossible constantly to oversee the work of more than a few of the men near camp. John made it a rule to look over the entire crew at least twice a day, including the teamster on the road and the men at the roll-ways on the river.

This morning he went faithfully from one end of the line to the other, then hurried back to the road, looked over the hauling and finished by a visit to the roll-ways. It was bitter cold—three-shirt weather, with a vengeance—but the hardened, warmly clad lumber-jacks were not allowing the cold to interfere with their work. Apparently everything was all right. John hurried back to the office and resumed his bookkeeping.

At eleven o'clock his attention was drawn from the books by the sound of a logging-sleigh, coming in slowly from the woods. John sprang to the door and looked out. The sleigh bore a single layer of logs on which was thrown a heap of pine boughs, and on the boughs lay two men, one unconscious, the other writhing and groaning in pain. Sick at heart, John rushed to the sleigh as it pulled up to the bunk-house and recognized the two sawyers whom he had last spoken to on his tour of the woods.

"Donovan and Gavin—both good men in the woods—don't see hownell they got it," said one of the men who had accompanied the sleigh.

Donovan, the older man, lay still on the boughs. Gavin, a small man, cursed and moaned.

"Take Donovan, you fellows," ordered John.

And as two of the men picked up the still figure and bore it into the warmth of the bunk-house John took Gavin in his arms and followed. As he laid him on a blanket on the floor the injured man coughed violently and the odor of his breath struck John full in the face. Gavin was drunk; his breath reeked with the smell of whisky.

John bent quickly over Donovan. The man was breathing but faintly, but on his breath too was the taint of liquor. As John looked at him Donovan raised his head a foot from the floor, opened his eyes a little, clawed spasmodically at his crushed chest and dropped back with a rattle on the floor.

"He got the butt square in the chest," said one of the men. "It's a wonder he lived as long as he did."

"How did it happen?" snapped John as they stripped Gavin to examine his injuries.

"A lodged tree," replied the teamster who had driven them in. "They dropped one that hit another tree and stuck. Then they pried her loose at the butt. Can't understand it; two good men like them doing that. She jumped back on 'em before they could get out of the way. Donovan was right in front of the butt, so he got it bad. Gavin was kind of scraped on one side."

A hasty examination showed that this was true. Gavin's left arm was broken and from his shoulder down, his side was bruised and torn cruelly.

"Get the team of drivers and the light sleigh ready—in a hurry!" commanded John, binding up the man's injuries as best he could. "Get a lot of blankets and throw in the sleigh, one of you, while some one gets the team ready."

By the time he had stanched the flow of blood from Gavin's wounds the sleigh came whirling up to the door. The injured man was made as comfortable as possible in the seat beside the driver. Then in the back of the sleigh, carefully bundled in blankets, went what was left of poor Donovan.

"Don't think of your team," said John to

Digitized by Google

the driver. "Drive every step of the road. Get to the Point as quick as you can regardless of consequences. Get away!"

The whip cracked, the horses leaped forward and the sleigh sped down the tote-road out of sight and hearing.

"Poor Donovan," said the men, and went back to their work in the woods.

THE horror of the event had left John sick and weak. Accidents—even fatal accidents—he knew were inevitable in the woods. But Donovan and Gavin had been drinking. Old lumberjacks as they were, they would never have committed the fatal error of prying loose the butt of a lodged tree unless their minds had been befuddled by whisky. They had been sober when he spoke to them in the morning. There was no whisky in camp. Gavin and Donovan must have got the liquor that killed one and crippled the other after he had made his rounds that morning.

With rage and horror in his heart John set off through the woods for the scene of the accident. He avoided the men as he went and reached the place alone. A score of feet had tracked out the signs of the tragedy, but John began to search the place carefully, and eventually was rewarded by finding an empty bottle, carelessly buried in the snow. He knew that somebody must have brought the whisky to the men and he set out to search for tracks that might tell the tale.

To his surprise he found the marks of a single pair of skees running from where the two men had been sawing in a straight line for Whisky Falls. Back-tracking, he found that the skee-runner had come from the direction in which his crew was working. He followed the tracks back until he came to the next pair of sawyers who happened to be two of the men who had helped him in the fight in the stables on Christmas Day.

"Who came through on skees, boys?" he asked, after the accident had been discussed.

"A fellow who'd been hunting over in the swamp," was the reply. "He was going through up to the Falls."

"Did he have anything to drink?"

"He offered us a drink," said one of the men. "We ain't neither of us drinking, so he went along."

As John continued on to the next pair of sawyers he heard shouting and laughing, and as he came upon them he saw that they had been drinking. John remembered the pair as belonging to the party that had come to camp drunk on Christmas Day.

"Fellow came through and gave us a touch out of a bottle," they explained. "Hain't got no objection to a man taking one snort on a cold day like this have you, Boss?"

"Not if you only take one," said John. "Who was the fellow who gave it to you?"

The men looked at each other. Then one spoke boldly.

"Well, he was tending bar in Wah Song's Christmas. He says he's laying off to hunt nowadays."

"All right," said John. "Now listen, boys: Donovan was just killed and Gavin was crippled on account of being drunk on the whisky that fellow gave them. After this the man who takes a drink in this crew, no matter who brings the stuff in, is going to get his time. More than half of the crew never drinks at all. I'd rather tackle the job with those sober men alone than have a lot of booze-fighters spoiling things. You make up your mind what you want to do; but the next time you take a drink around here, out you go!"

He retraced his steps and followed the skee tracks toward the Falls. Near the edge of the Pines he met Nels who was coming back toward camp.

"Did you see him?" asked John, pointing to the tracks.

"I did," said Nels. "I saw him first. It was Wah Song's bartender. He'd been hunting down on the swamp, he said, and was taking a short cut through."

John quickly related what had happened to Gavin and Donovan, and what he had heard from the men who had accepted the hunter's invitation to drink. As Nels listened, his jaws tightened and he shifted his rifle from one arm to the other.

"The sneaking —— —— ——!" he said softly. "So that's their game now is it? I knew Bart would be cooking up something. Slipping whisky to the crew! Trust Bart to cook up something good. He knows that the drinking men who get a taste of booze in this cold weather will be crazy to get more. Yes, he's a fox, Bull Bart is. I should have plugged him down there in the office."

"How did that man get down in the Pines?" asked John. "He didn't pass you, of course?"

Digitized by Google

"You bet he didn't. If he had come this way Donovan would be living yet. He must have gone down below the Pines on the other side of the river. Then he swung across, came up the swamp and hit the men working farthest from camp on his way back to the Falls."

"And I suppose that's Bart's scheme now," said John, speaking aloud his thoughts. "He'll be slipping the men whisky whenever there's a chance. Well, that's got to be stopped, or the job's a failure."

"Just so," said Nels seriously. "But how in the devil you're going to stop it I don't see. There's a lot of country to cover; you can't keep a man from slipping in now and then with a few bottles."

"But we can make it darn risky to do it," said John grimly. "I've been thinking it over. There are about thirty men in camp who can't be trusted on the booze proposition. These fellows are nearly all paired off together. I'm going to break that up. I'm going to pair each one of the booze-fighters with one of the men that I can depend on. And I'm going to let each one of the sober men know that there'll be twenty-five dollars extra on his month's check if he helps us lay hands on any whisky peddler that comes near camp. What do you think of it, Nels?"

Nels shook his head in admiration.

"By golly!" he chuckled. "I think maybe Bull Bart ain't the foxiest man in the woods, after all."

CHAPTER XXVI

A VISIT TO PEABODY POINT

JOHN knew that it would be impossible to keep all the men in camp that Saturday night and Sunday. Because they had worked the Sunday before, the wilder portion of the crew was fairly clamoring for the release and excitement which would come with the close of Saturday's work.

Though John realized that when his men went to Whisky Falls they would be in the hands of Bart and Wah Song and that Bart undoubtedly was figuring on the regular Saturday night spree of the men as an opportunity for crippling the camp, he had seen enough of the lumber-jacks by this time to know that to attempt to hold them in camp would mean a riot and failure. He was under obligations to the men for having worked last Sunday, and there was nothing to do but to let those go who wished to go. At noon he said briefly to the men as they ate:

"You've all heard of what happened to Donovan and Gavin, boys. You know a couple of good men like them wouldn't have monkeyed around the butt of a lodged tree if they'd been in their right senses. They weren't in their right senses; they were drunk. The Company hasn't got anything to say about what you boys do away from camp, but it has here.

"Any man bringing whisky into camp is doing the Company dirt and doing every man in camp dirt by hurting the job. Any man bringing whisky back with him tonight or Sunday, or who isn't in shape to go to work Monday morning, will get his time. Now remember that, you fellows who're going to the Falls tonight."

The tragic accident of the day had no depressing effect upon the men bent upon celebrating that evening. Rather it excited them.

"Man can't tell when he's going to get it. Better have a good time while you last."

Twenty-five of them drew small sums on their pay when they came in from the woods at dark and after supper they set out through the nipping cold for Whisky Falls.

John watched them go with deep misgivings. Though he knew that not one of them had in their hearts the least liking for Bart, and therefore Bart could win no hold on them in their right senses, he realized that in whisky and vice Bart and Wah Song possessed the two allies that could rouse the devil in these reckless woodsmen and tempt them where proffers of money and advantage would be met with jeers.

"And you can not keep them away from it," said Norby, with whom John talked it over. "All over the world I have seen it—the fine young fellows with the square shoulders and the bright eyes, they're the ones who throw themselves away, as I did when I was young and the whole world was before me. Bart will try to get those boys away from this camp some way. We will see if he can break the hold you've already got on them."

To John's surprise and relief, a dozen of the men were back in camp shortly after midnight. He recognized them as men who, though they were hard drinkers and had

Digitized by Google

been in the fight against him at the stables, he counted as among his best friends in camp.

They had all been drinking, but their potations had not carried them beyond the stage of careless good humor. The two sawyers who had confessed to drinking in the woods that day were among them. As they saw the light in the office where John was sitting, the men halted and put their heads together in consultation. Presently the two sawyers came over to the office.

"No booze in this crowd, Boss John," said one. "Every man frisked himself and there isn't a bottle in the gang."

"Good work," said John. "How does it happen you're back so early?"

"Oh, we agreed when we went up that we'd get back tonight," was the reply. "So none of us drank any more'n he could hold."

"Yes," chimed in the second man, "and Bart and Wah Song were darn sociable and friendly. Gosh! Any time the Chineser would see you without a glass in his hand he'd tell the barkeep to give you a drink on him. The logging was too good; we got suspicious and took cigars."

"The rest of the boys will be laid out stiff," added the first man as they left. "They didn't have better sense than to let Wah Song fill 'em up in a hurry."

This prediction proved true only in a degree. During the rest of the night five more men came straggling into camp, and next morning a sixth one appeared with the rising sun.

"Where are the rest of the boys?" asked John, when the man had steadied himself slightly with huge drafts of black coffee.

"Oh, they're gone, gone," muttered the man.

"Gone where?"

"Spirit Lake — Spirit Lake — on spree! Wah Song's barkeep got sleigh; made up party. Spirit Lake—spree. Not me; too foxy for'm. Boys—all laid out. Can't drink with me. Ooh! My head!"

John understood. Spirit Lake lay twenty miles eastward from the Falls. Its River Front saloon was known far and wide through the Big Woods. The seven men who had gone, or rather been taken, to Spirit Lake might be back at the end of a week—they might not be back at all. With Donovan and Gavin this made nine men that he had lost, and as a full crew working every day was necessary to the success of the job, John saw that he must find new help.

"Hook up the drivers, Nels," he ordered after breakfast. "We'll have to go down to the Point to look for some more men."

He dressed himself with particular care for a foreman merely bent upon seeking workmen. He even had Dugan come into the office and trim his hair. And Dugan expressed the bold opinion that this was foolishness.

"In this cold weather leave all your hair on," he advised. "When I get grown I'm going to let my whiskers grow all Winter, like Norby."

JOHN and Nels drove to the Point as swiftly as they could without hurting the horses, the twenty below zero making the drive anything but a pleasure. At the Point, John at once hunted up the mill superintendent and told him his needs.

"Get me ten new men," he directed. "I've got to have them or fall down on the job."

"Then you've got to fall down," retorted the superintendent grimly.

"Why?"

"Because Bull Bart has been raking the woods and settlements around here, and he's hired every man he could get to go over to the big Lowrey camp over the other side of Spirit Lake. He's offering five dollars a month better than we're paying. You can't hire a lumber-jack within fifty miles of here."

John took the news without change of countenance, but within he felt a shock that told that the blow had registered. So that was Bart's game. That was how he was going to make good his threat of sewing up the job in the Pines—and with the money and resources of the Lowrey interests behind him.

"I see," said John quietly. "Are there any men in the settlement here who can pull a saw?"

The superintendent smiled.

"Well, there's me, for instance; and there's old Doctor Dean; and there's the two boys in the office. I think the four of us might do half a man's work if you drove us hard. Outside of that there's nothing but the women and kids. No, I'd have sent you two men to take Donovan and Gavin's

Digitized by Google

places if I could have got 'em any way at all."

John turned away with a new line of worry between his eyes. He walked with heavy feet and hanging head toward the walk leading up to the house of his uncle.

"Oh ho, Cousin John!"

He looked up, his sense of depression fleeing at the thrill of hearing Belle's voice. She was coming down the hill, running so swiftly that her hair flowed back over her shoulders, and bearing in her hands a steaming dish.

"It's broth for poor Gavin," she said as she came up to him. "Come with me; I must get it to him before it gets cooled."

She sped away again and John followed to the old Company doctor's house on the mill-pond, where Gavin was comfortably lodged in bed.

"Bless yer hairt, Miss Peabody!" mumbled the helpless man as Belle flung open the door. "Do ye be havin' time to make broth fer a fool loike me?"

"How are you coming on, Gavin?" asked John.

Gavin looked up in surprise and turned his eyes away in shame. He did not speak or look again at John until Belle had placed the bowl convenient to his sound right arm.

"Well, boss," he quavered, "Donovan—the saints rest him—an' me paid hard enough for being —— fools."

"It was hard luck, Gavin," said John. "The boys were all asking for you. I hope you're coming along all right."

"Did ye know—" said Gavin, looking up—"did ye know how it happened?"

"I know. I know all about it. Don't worry about that. Get well as quick as you can."

"A bottle an' two —— fools," said Gavin doggedly. "Well, we paid fer't, boss, hard enough. But, th' saints willing, I'll not be layin' here long. Nothun' but me arm, the doctor says. I'll be back in camp in another week. Not that I'll be any good wit' th' saw th' rest of th' Winter. But a man can droive tote-team with wan good arm, boss, an' ye can put th' lad on th' tote-team on a saw to make up half th' sawing crew that whisky cost ye."

"Good boy, Gavin," said John, grasping his hand heartily. "Don't worry about it, but get on your feet as soon as you can. The boys all want to see you up again."

"Thank ye fer that, boss. An' bless ye, Miss Peabody, though I ain't worth the trouble you're takin' fer me, at all—at all!"

"And Uncle John?" said John, the moment Belle and he were out of the house. "How is he?"

"Oh, Cousin John!" she cried cheerfully. "I do believe you've saved his life."

"I? How in the world could I do that?"

She nodded, looking up at him as they walked briskly along.

"You have; if he lives, you are the one who has done it—you've done it all. You see, the doctor—the specialist—told him last Summer that he must give up his affairs if he wished to live much longer. He couldn't do that—until you came. And now, why, he sits back in his easy chair and says he's going to take it easy for the rest of his days, because you are handling his fight against Lowrey's crowd better than he could himself.

"I had the big doctor from the city up just as soon as I could get a message to him. He just left this morning to get the evening train at Black Bear Lake. He says that if Uncle John will drop all worry, rest constantly, and do as I tell him, he may delay the next attack for ever so long. And Uncle John said: 'Yes, yes, doctor; I can do that now. I've got a big nephew of mine taking care of things for me.' Oh, Cousin John, I think it's fine, fine of you!"

John's face clouded.

"Suppose I should fail; suppose I should not be able to live up to his expectations in handling his affairs?"

They were climbing the hill now, and she looked at him quickly, instantly conscious of the seriousness of his meaning.

"But you won't fail; I know you won't," she said stoutly. "What's troubling you, Cousin John?"

John told her of the disappearance of the seven men and what he had heard of Bart's latest activities. Her eyes flashed at the mention of Bart's name.

"But they won't beat you," she said. "They can't. The men are all loyal to you; I've been talking with Gavin, and I know. You've done wonders so far. Think of what you've done, and you'll feel as I do when I know they can't beat you. And even if they do," she added femininely, "you will have managed as well as any one could. But you're going to win; I know it."

In the hallway she held her finger up to her lips warningly.

Digitized by Google

"We haven't told him about Donovan and Gavin," she said. "You mustn't tell him about losing the seven men. Be—be cheerful, won't you, Cousin John?"

He looked at her and the clouds promptly fled from his face.

"That's right!" laughed Belle. "You were as black as a thunder-cloud a moment ago. Now, forget about everything that's been troubling you, and smile—that's right! And go in—quick while you're still smiling—and see Uncle John."

Smiling broadly, barely suppressing the laughter that bubbled up within him, and feeling much like a boy who has been cheerfully hustled about, John entered the library where Wolf John sat or rather lay comfortably ensconced in a huge reclining-chair, a book in his hands.

"Don't—don't on your life—ask me how I am," commanded the old man, carefully marking a place in the book. "And don't dare to bother me with any questions or details about the job. I know things are all right by your face, and little Belle has got me bluffed till I daren't even remember that I'm in the logging business. You're the boss now; I'm a comfortable dead-head, just lolling around in the back-water."

In spite of this, however, he managed to ask half a dozen pertinent questions concerning the job. John remembered Belle's injunction, so when immediately after luncheon he left to drive back to camp he left Wolf John serenely buried in his book, satisfied with John's white falsehoods that the job was running as smoothly as could be, that not even a cloud appeared on the horizon to indicate possible trouble.

"I'll have to beat them somehow now, won't I?" said John to Belle as she came out to bid him good-by. "If I should fall down after this, the shock would be more than he could stand."

"You will beat them, Cousin John," she said, as if it were something that she was quite certain of. "I know you will—just as I knew—or felt—that you were going to find me up there in that shanty on the bayou. And now, you simply must make good! For if— But I won't speak of such possibilities. Good-by; and remember that I *know* you won't fall down."

"Well," he said as he drove away, "that makes two reasons why I've got to make good. And I'll never show up here again unless I do."

CHAPTER XXVII

TRAPPED FOXES

JOHN had planned to be back in camp before dark, for though he trusted fully Norby, Brackett, Burns, and the other dependable men left in charge of the camp, he had no intention of slacking his personal vigilance. A late start and a loose shoe on one of the horses delayed his arrival, so when Nels finally pulled up before the camp stables it was after supper-time. From the bunk-house came a noise of laughter and shouting that told John that something unusual was taking place, and, stiff and numb from the cold, he stamped his way in.

The bunk-house was crowded with every man in camp, and every man's face was wearing a grin. In a cleared space in one corner sat Norby holding on one knee a pale, puffy youth who was a stranger to John. Norby held the man's two wrists behind him in the grip of one of his huge hands. With his other hand he tweaked an ear, exactly as a teacher might tweak the ear of a recalcitrant schoolboy. As John entered, the crowd shouted with glee.

"Here's the boss, Norby. The boss ain't heard his story. Make him tell it again, Norby; go ahead."

Norby bounced the man up and down on his knee. John, joining in the spirit of the men, awaited developments.

"Tell the boss that story, you tough whisky-peddler," commanded Norby. "You see, boss, this bad-man here came up to Dugan and me while we were hunting up toward the Falls this afternoon. Oh, he's a jolly fellow, boss. He sat down and told us a funny story right away. Then he pulled out a quart bottle and said, 'Have a drink on that.' So Dugan took the bottle. 'You haven't got a little more on you that you'd sell a fellow for the boys back in camp, have you?' I said. Then he pulled out two more quart bottles. So I said, 'Come with me and tell the boys that story,' and Dugan smashed the bottles and I tucked him under my arm and carried him in, and he has to tell the story to every man that comes in.

"It's a good story; he's a good talker, smart boy, this fellow. You want to hear it. Go ahead, tough whisky-peddler; tell the story once more."

The man looked up appealingly to John,

Digitized by Google

but John was in no mood to interfere with the men's fun. In a tone of weary resignation, as if dead tired of repeating the same words over and over again, and with a most sorrowful expression on his face the victim began:

"Big, tough Swede named 'Box-Car Ole,' pulled saw in Lowrey's Camp Number Four, beyond Spirit Lake, some years ago. Went to town every Saturday night on spree, licked everybody who'd fight, tore uniform off policeman, and went back to camp singing. Toughest man in the woods.

"One night he came into town when there was a camp-meeting. Went in; got religion. Minister got him up in front and began to pray for him. Minister says: 'Oh, Lord, be with this poor, weak, helpless sinner tonight. Tonight this poor, weak, helpless sinner will have his trial. Tonight his Satanic Majesty will come and grapple with this poor, weak, helpless sinner. Yes he will grapple with him—' 'Hol' on dere, Mester Prest,' says Box-Car Ole, 'ef dat Satanic Majesty faller grapple vid diss poor, veak, halplose sinner—he'll skoll need new foreman in deh morning.' "

John had heard the story—the incident really had occurred as described—several times since coming to the woods, but there was something so ludicrous about the dejected man's mechanical, sorrowful utterance that he could not resist joining in the shout of laughter with which the men greeted the end of the story. The puffy victim rolled his bleared eyes around helplessly. John felt an impulse to relent toward him, but he thought of Donovan and the impulse fled.

"So you're a whisky-peddler, are you?" he said, eying the man. "You're in a fine business. Who is he, boys, do any of you know him?"

"Tin-horn gambler and hanger-on around Wah Song's," came the prompt reply.

"I suppose Bart sent you down?" John said.

The man made no reply. The defiance had been taken out of him by the torture of humiliation which the men had meted out to him, and he was as helpless as a child in Norby's grasp.

"Well, boys, what shall we do with him? It was one of his kind that killed poor Donovan. What do you say?"

"We've left it for you to say, boss," boomed Brackett. "Some of the boys was for riding him on a rail."

John looked at the unhealthy puffiness of the man, at Norby's huge shoulders, and had an inspiration.

"Boys, you know what that gang up there is after," he said. "They want to put this camp on the bum by taking men away from it. Donovan and Gavin are gone, and seven others, because of their rot-gut. Well, if they take men away from us they ought to be willing to give men up, when we lay hands on them. The fellow is going to take the place of one of the men that his gang got away from us. He's going to stay in camp and work. He's going to begin pulling saw with Norby tomorrow morning."

The men howled. They slapped one another on the back and roared with laughter. It was the perfect punishment; it was the poetry of justice. Sentenced to pull saw with Norby! The men looked at the pale, puffy youth and leaned against the bunks, weak from laughter.

"Norby, you will see that he doesn't get away," said John, as he turned to go to the cook-shack. "Don't bother him any more; just make sure he doesn't get away."

In spite of what was in prospect for him, the prisoner gave John a look of something like gratitude. He had feared that he might be made to repeat his story once more.

THE men greeted Norby and his charge with cheers when they appeared together for breakfast in the morning. Norby never allowed the man to get farther than arm's reach away from him. He placed him at his side at the table; when he had eaten his breakfast he rose, taking the man with him. Linking his arm in his prisoner's he led the way into the woods, assuring him that though it might look easy to get away in the woods, he, Norby, would make it his business to see that in fact it would be very hard.

"Look at Norby all swelled up!" protested Brackett. "You needn't brag, Norby; I'm going to get me one of those, too."

"Me too, me too!" laughed others. "Norby, you needn't think you're the only man who can have a pet."

They went to their work still laughing at the spectacle presented by the wobegone whisky-peddler in Norby's toils. And John took heart at the loyalty of his men. Bart was beaten on this move, he felt sure. With

Digitized by Google

the men in this mood there would be no chance for Wah Song's whisky to disrupt the crew. John set out on his first round in better spirits, though the gap left by eight men gone made him thoughtful.

As he neared the roll-way on the river he heard a mighty shout and roars of laughter. Running forward he saw the peavy men forming a circle out on the ice. In the circle Brackett and a stranger were fighting as if for dear life. As John leaped down the bank Brackett caught his opponent around the waist, threw him flat on the snow and sat on him.

"I got one, too, Boss!" he cried as he saw John. "The son-of-a-gun! I had to fight for mine, but I got him, and now he's coming back and help load. Norby ain't the only one."

John soon had the story. The man—a heavy-set, swarth fellow of evil countenance —had approached the lad who had been on the tote-team with an offer of liquor. The boy, recognizing him as the man who had made him drunk on the road, had slipped away and informed Brackett. Brackett had chased the man a mile and a half through the woods, catching him on the river. Then they had fought, the man refusing to obey Brackett's command to come back and work.

"And now he's got to do it because I've showed him I'm best man," said Brackett, hoisting his victim to his feet. "Come on, you scum! I'll give you a chance to do something besides peddle whisky. That goes, don't it, Boss?"

John nodded.

"You took your chance," he said to the man, "now you've got to take your medicine. We can use about nine of your fellows as fast as Bull Bart and Wah Song will send them down."

"Think you're going to get any work out of me?" demanded the man. "Why, when Bart hears of this he'll be down here and clean you off the map."

"Watch that man close, Brackett," said John, paying no attention to the man. "I see he's a bad man. If he gets rough, well, you've got my word to go as far as you like in taming him."

"You bet," said Brackett. "I can see he's a tough one by the look in his eye. We'll watch him. Grab hold, somebody. Now, come along, you, or I'll beat your head off."

Helpless between Brackett and another man the whisky-peddler was led off into the woods, protesting and cursing at every step. The men cheered and went back to their work.

"Have a full crew again pretty soon, Boss, if they keep coming down here," they said.

And at noon they roared and howled with laughter; for as they were seating themselves in the cook-shack Nels came into camp marching at rifle point a third man from Whisky Falls, the man who had given Donovan and Gavin the whisky on Saturday morning. Surprise and terror showed plainly upon his face. He recoiled from the crowd of hairy, laughing faces that received him into camp, felt Nels' rifle barrel in the small of his back and stood stock-still, numbed and dumb with fright.

"He didn't have only a quart on him," said Nels. "He said he was out looking for a couple of the boys from the Falls who'd gone out in the bush and hadn't got back. I told him to come with me and he'd find them."

The man at last managed to speak.

"What do you fellows think you're going to do with me?"

"Going to make you work!" shouted a dozen men in reply. "We've got the right medicine for bloats like you."

"You can't do it," the man began to bluster, but just at that moment Norby came marching his new working partner toward the shack.

The youth looked sideways at the newcomer and with hanging head marched past without a word. Brackett and another man soon followed with the second prisoner. He likewise stalked meekly in to his meal. Nels' man wet his lips. He tried to speak. His tongue failed him.

"You'd better go in and get your dinner," said John. "You're going to help the gang on the roll-ways this afternoon."

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE LAUGH ON BART

THE JOKE was too big, too well fitted to the free humor of lumber-jacks to keep. It spread over the Big Woods. It became a tradition, a tale which may be heard to this day around any camp-fire near the valley of the Brulé.

The tote-teamster carried it to Peabody

Digitized by Google

Point that afternoon. From the Point it spread quickly. The telephone bore it to Black Bear Lake that evening. From thence the snow-laden wires hummed it on its way to Spirit Lake. Spirit Lake radiated it far and wide over the snows. Within three days, wherever news went, men were laughing over the joke that Peabody's King Pines Camp had played on the whisky-peddlers from Whisky Falls.

The camp became famous in a few days. The lumber-jacks of the region, more eager for fun than for dollars, envied the crew that had perpetrated the coup. The seven men from the camp who were still at Spirit Falls became objects of attention. It was worth something to be able to say that one was of the King Pines Camp. Four of the seven, the four who had somehow managed to sober up, realized that they were missing the opportunity to share in the glory of their old camp.

In the darkness of night they slipped away from the notice of Wah Song's bartender who had carried them to Spirit Lake and struck out over the twenty cold miles leading back to camp. There they sheepishly told a story of being drugged and kidnapped against their will. John listened without comment.

"All right, boys," he said when the explanations were finished. "That's all past. The question is now: Do you intend to put in your full time at this camp until the job's finished; or do you intend to lose more time as you have this week? If you aren't going to stick, don't start working at all; because if you do the Company dirt you won't get a cent of money till this job's done. Understand? If you come back you come back for the whole time of the job."

"All right, Boss," they said, and hurried to hear from their more fortunate fellows the details of the story that was making the whole region laugh.

The story promptly traveled to Whisky Falls and reached Bart. It came, bearing the news that the whole woods were laughing at the fashion in which young Peabody had turned the tables on his enemies. It told Bart and Wah Song that the men of the woods for fifty miles around were laughing at them, and Whisky Falls promptly became a sullen hell full of smoldering rage.

"I tellee you him Mud big man," muttered Wah Song. "Lettee me hide woman, keep woman in shlanty, makee him thlow up job. No lettee me do; now look-see what you catchee."

"Close your yellow trap," commanded Bart. "I'll take care of that fool down there. He's got too much nerve to live—putting the laugh on me like this. Curly Joe's arm will be well next week. Now don't let me hear any more of your whining."

NEWS of this conversation came to John by word of mouth of men who had been at Whisky Falls. Bart was raving during the days immediately after news had come of John's coup. He had begun to drink hard, though it was traditional that liquor never affected him except to make him quiet and dangerous. Men came to the Falls, bought drinks, lounged carelessly around and, casually, led the conversation around to the fate of Wah Song's whisky-peddlers.

Then the beast in Bart flared up unrestrained. Two men who had been careless enough to mention the subject in his hearing went away from the Falls with their physiognomies beaten and kicked out of all human semblance. They were young men and the need for revenge rose large within them.

Thrown out of Wah Song's they made their way to the Peabody Camp, the camp that had come to stand as the camp of the enemies of the gang at Whisky Falls. Here they told all they had heard from Bart. Then they went to work, John promising them that if Bart brought about a clash they would be given the opportunity to secure the revenge which they craved.

The word went around through the woods that Bart had met his match. In the years that he had acted as Wolf John's foreman, Bart by his brutality had made many warm enemies. Men who had hated him and feared him now heard what had happened and ceased to fear him.

In spite of the mill superintendent's statement that Bart had hired every lumberjack in the region for the Lowrey camp, there came drifting into the King Pines Camp now, day by day, by ones and twos, in all a dozen men who were anxious to be on the scene if there was a chance that Bart was to get his deserts. By Saturday John had a full crew again, and that evening he gave each of the captured whisky-peddlers a check for a full week's pay

Digitized by Google

and told them that they were free to go.

The men shuffled nervously when the checks were offered them. Presently they blurted out their decision: they were afraid to go back to the Falls, the camp was the one place where they were safe from Bart's rage, and they wanted to remain.

"All right," said John. "But if you hire out, remember you're hiring out for the full length of the job—over two months."

"That's all right," said one man. "By that time we'll have enough coming to take us to where Bart can't get at us."

Only a few of the men went to Whisky Falls that Saturday night. These returned before midnight with two of their number fit subjects for the hospital. Bart had been drinking, the men said. He was raving. The two injured men had been unfortunate enough to mention the peddlers in his hearing, and Bart had followed his custom, had jumped on them, beaten and kicked them into insensibility and hurled them out into the snow.

John felt sorry for the men when he saw their mutilated faces, but on afterthought he felt grimly glad of Bart's brutality. It would have a two-fold effect: the men would have a grudge against Bart, and they would keep away from Whisky Falls.

TO BE CONCLUDED

THE CAMP-FIRE

A MEETING-PLACE FOR READERS, WRITERS AND ADVENTURERS

LAST month we had with us our old friend E. A. Morphy with "A Question of Brains." Though an Englishman—as much an Englishman, that is, as a man named Morphy can be—he spent many years in this country, much of the time in California, and had a good deal more experience in the U. S. than is indicated by his own jocular statement of same: "For some years I was a sporting editor in America—I did horse-racing in Summer and the religious news in Winter for the Chicago *Evening Post*—and knew several delightful gentlemen in the bunco-steering, poker-playing and allied industries of the U. S."

YOU will recall, too, that Mr. Morphy was granted by us of the Camp-Fire the unique right of using real cuss-words instead of 2-em dashes in our pages. Recently he's been using them orally because an old wound in his neck keeps getting him rejected from the English army. The following doesn't bear directly upon his story in the last issue, but it, too, is "a question of brains" and it makes good listening.

It was written a long time ago when we had up for discussion the real facts of the storming of Dargai. Indeed, only our very limited space has kept me from giving you a lot more of the amusing stories Mr. Morphy has written for the Camp-Fire at various times. At least I'm saving them carefully and sparring for an opening.

But the only time I saw a really big adventure—a British army scooting like stricken hares, to wit—the censor blotted the bowels out of the tale with a pot of blacking, and I never had a chance to write it since.

That was near a place called Swaikot, in December, 1897, when the Johnnies that had taken Dargai while the pipers played, came running down from Bagh, lost and damned, in the bed of a river, chucking their ammunition as they came, broaching the rum-casks—the native followers did that—and going to sleep in the water while the Afridis sniped the lights out of them.

A FEW days earlier I had a sort of toy adventure of my own, which impressed me deeply—as small things often do when they occur in the middle of big ones.

We had been marching all day—from Ilam Gudr, up the Gandao Pass and over the Momani Khotal—and got to Swaikot by dark. My old servant, a Punjabi Mohammedan, got lost in the shuffle, and I started out again to find him. I should mention that the Gandao Pass was no place for roller-skates. There were places that a laden mule could not squeeze through, and through such blighted spots we had to hike guns and camels. Result was, the fag end of the column did not get into Swaikot until a day later.

Digitized by Google

Swaikot is a place within the meaning of the Act, like the sky. It's just there. I mean there is nothing to tell a man that it is Swaikot or Hodson's Corners—nothing but rocks and mountains and balmy weather. Well, from Swaikot at nightfall I started to go back down the hill to the ford over the Momani River, when a Tommy of the Inniskillings Fusiliers ran bang into me and cursed me.

NOW I was only a "damned civvy," as the Tommies say, but I was just then messing with certain officers, and it was not etiquette for me to be damned by any Tommy. I was hungry and cross and tired. So I put my hand out and stopped that staggering and impolite Tommy, and said: "Damn you, my man! Do you know what you're doing? You're drunk!"

"I'm not, sir," says he. "I'm kilt! I can't see!"

So then I grabbed him by the arm—left my poor old Chidi Khan to find his own way home—and toted him off to the field hospital, giving the alarm by the way. Not fifty yards lower down the hill a party of Zakkas had hopped out in the darkness, split the heads of those Tommies, nipped their rifles and bolted.

The fellow that was rude to me was No. 3. He had a typical Irish head—hard to split. The other two were mutton at once, cleft to the chin, but this fellow was only split down the center of his skull, like as if his hair was parted in the middle. For about two inches you could see the white cerebral matter sticking through. I helped to dress the fellow, and felt sorry I had damned him when he took it all so pluckily. Never lost consciousness for a jiffy.

"If he's not dead tomorrow he'll be dead in about forty-eight hours," said Surgeon-Captain Healy to me. (He and I had been in the same class at Trinity College, Dublin). "When the inflammation starts he'll go off his head, poor chap, and it will hurt like the dickens. Pity he didn't get snuffed out at once like the other two poor fellows!"

I agreed with him. If I've got to be skivered or shot, I'd like to have it all over at once.

"I'm sorry now," said I to Healy, "but I swore at that poor Johnny when he ran into me down the hill. Thought he was drunk!"

A COUPLE of months later, one day, I had occasion to visit the wells above Lundi Kotal, in the Khaibar, and I noticed that one of the Tommies on the picket there went out of his way to give me a particularly affable salute.

"Good day, soldier," said I. "How are things?"

"I seen yez that time all right, sir!" said he. "I'm doin' splendid!"

It was the gentleman whose brains I had seen sticking out of his head the night I went out to look for Chidi Khan by the ford below Swaikot.

THE Adventurers' Club of Chicago is now installed in its new club-house at 26 N. Dearborn Street, as handsomely appointed quarters, they tell me, as those of any club in Chicago. Day and night service is maintained, and every week a special dinner is served with a "somewhat different" dish—bear-steak, possum, venison, etc.

The walls are hung with trophies of war, the chase and exploration from all over the globe (the president's gavel is a Fiji chief's war-club), and there are more to come, for the flag of the club is now being carried into the far places by six different expeditions: one up the Amazon, one in Borneo, two in Africa, one in Bolivia and one in India.

THE Adventurers' Club of Chicago is certainly "going some." One of its members, Frank R. E. Woodward, has deeded the club some land on Blue Lake, Wisconsin, within easy reach of Chicago, and other members have "come across" with equipment for a log club-house as a permanent camp. This, with their handsome city quarters, makes them very comfortable indeed, thank you. They have, in the above, quite outdistanced the parent chapter in New York, which follows more informal lines, but is nevertheless going strong and hearty in this, its third year.

WE'VE come to take it rather for granted that most of our writers are wanderers. It is true in most cases, but here is a glaring exception. One of his ancestors was one of the "Green Mountain Boys," and one of the four signers of Vermont's separate Declaration of Independence. That man's son was one of the earliest settlers of East Dorset, Vermont. For over a hundred years the family has lived in the same spot, owning the same land. The writer in question is Dr. John I. Cochrane, author of "The Crimson Chamber," in this issue, "The Crook and the Doctor," and other stories of *Sled* or *Dan Wheeler*, king criminal; and he represents one of three generations born in the same room.

David and his son John were known as "The Squire" successively and had the only Law Book in the community giving advice on legal matters. My grandfather built the first marble-mill quarried the first marble in this end of the State to be sawed and drawn to Troy by ox-team. In the forties he put all he had made—some fifty thousand—into the railroad of which he became a director. It went through and like all roads at that period ruined its promoters to make fortunes for others. Hence we come down to my birth, "land poor"—paying taxes on half a township that brought in almost nothing.

I was born in 1870, trotted on an Irish girl's knee, and brought up on farm fare and Irish ghost-stories. At fourteen I worked in my father's cheese-factory so that I might go to the Burr and Burton Seminary in the Winter. Also I got a pair of boxing-gloves, and held all-comers tournaments with the stone-cutters in "Cochrane's Hall," over the factory.

Digitized by Google

He went to Harvard with his eye on an amateur cup for sparring and other athletic honors, but, while he found he was not a white hope, he found that he "possessed a platinum lining hitherto unsuspected," and that class-room honors came easy. Even before graduation, by a special dispensation of the board of trustees, he was appointed an assistant in physics.

BUT he didn't stay. After some teaching and tutoring he took his M. D. at the University of Virginia as a preparation for the Marine Hospital Corps. Then to New York for two years in hospitals. Here is where Blackwell's Island prison came in, and Dr. Cochrane's knowledge of the underworld of New York City.

At U. of V. a fool coach put a crimp in my heart-muscle by working me at center on the 'varsity before I had got hard, in the Southern sun when the mercury was 110 in the shade. (I recall waking up in a deserted gym. in the dark, crawling to the swimming-pool, where I dropped in with a *hiss* and stayed until I could get on my feet.) I was in bed a week, and never got entirely over it. The bearing of this is that the Marine Hospital examiners turned me down on the physical, and I started in at country practise in Vermont.

You already know that there is, or was, a real character back of *Dan Wheeler*, and that there is, or was, such a mysterious and all-powerful Secret Order as is depicted in these stories.

CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE and Gordon McCreagh, both familiar to you as contributors to *Adventure*, are good friends, and often live under the same roof. Captain Dingle didn't send me the following for publication, but he's a good sport and won't mind my passing it on to you. It doesn't apply to his story in this issue, but that doesn't matter. It's sort of amusing in itself.

As McCreagh is standing over me, grinning like a Borneo ape, I think you'll be interested to hear under what conditions this story was written: I have been on a short sailing cruise in the sloop *Gauntlet*, the little vessel that won the Bermuda race some three or four years back against boats twice her size. I managed to get my feet badly scorched, or stung in weed, or by jelly-fish, or something; anyway they swelled up alarmingly, and matters were not improved when I nonchalantly dropped a couple of fathom of chain cable on them. Now, to write, I must have my legs horizontal. The only way McCreagh could suggest was the way I adopted: I am sitting in the bath-tub on a cushion, my trotters on another cushion; my typewriter is resting on the tub-sides, and here she goes. Some study! What?

AS TO his story in this number Captain Dingle has this to say:

There is more fact than fiction in the subject dealt with. The characters, Archie Sloss, Nutty Armstrong, and Willie Ogilvie, were real characters in the convict days of Australia, and it is a fact that Ogilvie died under the iron hand of Armstrong, with the result that an attempt was made to avenge him by some of the toughest of the hulk's prisoners.

Sloss became a notorious bushranger for a time, and rumor, in this case pretty well authenticated, has it that he escaped to England aboard a sailing vessel, persuading a dying passenger (who, however, was not Nutty Armstrong, but a man named ————) to assume his name in return for many kindnesses shown him during his illness and for taking the sick man's savings home to his mother.

The American Legion

THE nature and purpose of the American Legion no longer need explanation to you of the Camp-Fire. The Legion has become a national movement and, despite the inevitable obstacles, is growing steadily in numbers and strength. At least a large part of our fellow-citizens, instead of accepting the judgment of such eminent authorities on war and preparation for war as Miss Jane Addams, Bishop Greer, Andrew Carnegie, Nicholas Murray Butler and other ladies and gentlemen who have devoted their lives to entirely different matters, seem to prefer the expert judgment of men who have devoted their lives to the subject under discussion. The Legion is here to stay. And, big as it is, it has only begun to grow.

By the time this reaches you matters will have progressed considerably beyond their stage at this writing, since a magazine is necessarily made up pretty well ahead of its time of issue, so I can offer you little this month in the way of Legion news. But the main facts are always with us—the Legion serves a very vital purpose in preparation

Digitized by Google

for our country's defense and it is the duty of every one of us to further its cause in every way.

THAT duty applies particularly to us of the Camp-Fire, for it can not be forgotten that it is *our* Legion. The first crude idea was suggested by one of our members to you in October, 1914, in the November issue of this magazine. For several months after that I kept presenting and adding to it until, from your response, I saw that the idea bore possibilities of becoming something far bigger than a mere regiment of "rough riders." When I presented to you a plan of national scope and called in Dr. Hausmann so that the movement would no longer be limited to a magazine, but could develop an organization of its own, you marched with me side by side.

It was your support and your enrolments that finally gave Dr. Hausmann and me a tangible and partly organized movement, complete in all its essentials as it stands today, to lay before men of national importance. Their instant appreciation of its value made it possible to present the American Legion on a national basis to the American people. The American people—such part of them as do not believe that defenselessness ensures peace—did the rest.

YES, it is our Legion. We of the Camp-Fire brought it into being and reared it to man's estate. Without us it would not now be in existence. Therefore it is particularly our duty—and our privilege—to do all we can to further it. Let each one of you make it his business to bring into it at least two members. That will add hundreds of thousands if each does his part.

Make yourself its publicity agent. General Headquarters will supply you with copies of the application-blank, of the booklet explaining the Legion in detail, and of any other necessary printed matter. When you can get publicity for the Legion in newspapers and magazines, go to it. Doubtless many foolish arguments and unjust charges will be marshaled against it. Make it your business to meet them with facts and the truth. This is your chance to prove your Americanism in a practical way.

All communications should be addressed to the Secretary, The American Legion, 10 Bridge St., New York.

An Unknown Chapter in The Legion's History

THERE is one interesting and rather dramatic phase of the Legion's history that is not known to the public at large, but which you, who made the creation of the Legion possible, are of course entitled to know.

On March first the newspapers all over the land came out hard with the announcement of the Legion, generally playing it up prominently on the first page. Then they took it up editorially. The War and Navy Departments investigated and did not condemn the Legion. Letters, telegrams, telephone messages, personal visits, poured in on us so fast we couldn't possibly keep up with them. The enthusiasm and instant support it aroused were tremendous, overwhelming.

Naturally, too, some misunderstood its nature and purpose, and many weird statements were made—statements since rendered rather ridiculous by confronting them with facts. By the time news of the Legion's birth had been cabled to Europe the facts had been twisted into the remarkable idea that Theodore Roosevelt was organizing an American army for the purpose of attacking the Kaiser! I heard of one American woman, who had married in Germany, who cabled her representative in Cincinnati to sell all her American securities at once because of this coming war.

But, despite the minority who misunderstood, the announcement of the formation of the Legion swept the country with a great wave of enthusiasm.

YET—and here is the interesting phase of it in question — when that announcement of the Legion was given to the press and swept the country the American Legion consisted, wholly and entirely, of just Dr. Hausmann, some hundreds of you of the Camp-Fire who had already enrolled, myself, a letter from Theodore Roosevelt, an unofficial commendation from General Leonard Wood, with Captain Johnston and Commander Crank as advisers. (And of us of the Camp-Fire only Dr. Hausmann and I could be on the scene of action.)

True, the Legion had already been fully developed in all its fundamental essentials—even before our plans were laid before General Wood some weeks earlier—both the

Digitized by Google

Line and Special Service branches had been created, the formal application-blank, as some of you know personally, was practically as it stands today, men had been actually enrolled and the work of indexing and cross-indexing was already under way. But as to a formal working organization—well, there wasn't any. Dr. Hausmann was temporary secretary, Colonel Roosevelt had promised to serve on our advisory council when we got one, I was unofficial recruiting sergeant, and—that's as far as we'd gone. Since this magazine works several issues ahead I couldn't even keep you of the Camp-Fire up to date on the development of events.

There were no permanent offices, no clerks, no printed matter, no postage-stamps. The Legion wasn't incorporated. Its incorporators hadn't even been selected in advance. It hadn't even had its final name more than a few days.

A HAREBRAINED undertaking, then? No, only putting a firm conviction into action. Excellent authorities had told us the plan was sound and practical and needed. If we'd ever had any doubts as to the country's response to the idea they had been dispelled by the instant response from you of the Camp-Fire.

Why didn't we wait a while? Because, since the Legion was needed, the quicker it became a national movement, the better. Also, it would have been slow work to bring into the movement the needed prominent men unless we first secured the response and endorsement of the country. We had the essentials. The details of formal organization, permanent offices, clerical help, etc., we knew would follow naturally and easily enough.

IT IS due you that you should know these facts, for it was you of the Camp-Fire who made the American Legion possible, gave it to the country, and were the first to enroll in it. Some day, later on, I may put before you another idea to be built up by us into another great national reality—an idea even less "militaristic" than our Legion, but one that has in it even greater possibilities. For the present, though, we can rest content with what we, through the agency of our few pages once a month, have brought to pass.

PERHAPS some of you have wondered why we of the Camp-Fire have received so little credit for the Legion in the newspaper accounts. Because it might have hurt the Legion. As you will remember, I asked Dr. Hausmann to take hold and act as temporary secretary as a start toward an independent organization, for, months before the papers announced it, I knew the Legion was going to be too big to be limited by any one magazine, and told you so at our Camp-Fire meetings.

When the time came to announce the Legion through the newspapers I knew that if the name of this magazine appeared in connection with it there was the chance that some fool would start a cry of "circulation scheme" or "advertising scheme." At that time such a cry might have hurt the Legion's chances, for first impressions are sometimes hard to shake off. It was I who wrote the "copy" that was given to the press for the first announcement of the Legion, and I took care that the name of this magazine should nowhere appear in that copy. Now that the Legion is not only firmly on its feet, but has become a national movement by the people themselves, charges of its being in any way the instrument of any magazine are palpably ridiculous, and there can be no possible harm in giving all the facts to you of the Camp-Fire who already are entirely familiar with the part our magazine has played.

And anyhow, the important thing is not how much credit we get, but how much we can do for the Legion and for our country.

WHEN Robert J. Pearsall got the material and color for his story in this issue he was in the U. S. Marine Corps. In addition to a year and a half in the Philippines he put in a year at Pekin, cruised along the Chinese and Japanese coasts, and ended his service with some four months along the Mexican border. But that is only a part of his wandering "for to admire and for to see," and all that he has seen has become the "makings" of good stories.

OUR identification cards remain free to any reader. The two names and addresses and a stamped envelope bring you one.

Digitized by Google

The cards bear this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian, and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of ADVENTURE, New York, U. S. A., stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one friend, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. The names and addresses will be treated as confidential by us. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for purposes of business identification. Later, arrangements may perhaps be made for money deposits to cover cable or telegraph notifications. Cards furnished free of charge, *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application. Send no applications without the two names and two addresses in full.* We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Later, for the cost of manufacture, we may furnish, instead of the above cards, a card or tag of aluminum, proof against heat, water and general wear and tear, for adventurers when actually in the jungle, desert, etc.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give the two names and addresses in full when applying.*

CLINTON H. STAGG, in accordance with our custom, rises and introduces himself to the Camp-Fire. His story in this issue will also help introduce him.

Caught with the goods! I've read of adventure. I've heard it spoken of quite favorably. I know men who have had it in all its varied forms. But when it comes to meeting Ad. face to face and buying him a drink—well, he never kept any dates with *me.*

Adventure? Lord, man, I've never been able to catch a New York, New Haven and Hartford train! Missed four of 'em, too. One that beat me by two minutes was wrecked; seventeen killed, if I remember. Another derailed; twenty-one injured, I believe. In a short lifetime I've either taken the train ahead or the one behind a wreck no less than four times. What chance have I got?

THEY slammed an elevator door in my face down at the old Equitable building, and it made me so mad I wouldn't wait for the next car to take me up. I was across the street when they started banging in the alarms. I had intended to go to the top story. Adventure? Maybe I've never been where it was. But a man ought to get a little encouragement!

ABOUT four years ago I was a newspaper man in Jersey City. Oh, yes, there are. Over there one bright morning the city editor told me to take a run over to the Communipaw freight yards. He'd heard that they were unloading cars of dynamite in a way that was a menace to the town.

For an hour I sat on a string-piece, smoked cigarettes, and watched seventeen huskies sling cases of dynamite and black-powder onto the decks of the Mary B, Du Pont powder sloop. It *was* pretty careless work. But nobody seemed to mind. I got the number of workmen, the methods, etc., and started back. There's a stretch of water between Communipaw and J. C. called the "Gap." I left the rowboat on the Jersey City side and started for a 'phone. Then came the bang. I continued on my way. I knew all the details. I knew how many had been killed and all the rest of it. While New York was still looking up at the sky to see where the broken glass had come from, my paper was grinding out an edition with the complete story and names of the killed.

NOW don't get an idea that I'm knocking adventure. I'm not. I like adventure. I love adventure. I'd like to get near enough to give it a good slam in the jaw! But it's got the never-never on me, all right. It ducks every time I approach. On the level, if somebody will come across with a good-sized side bet I'll guarantee to carry a plate of hot soup from Paris to Berlin without burning my thumb.

And if you want the sordid details, I'm twenty-eight and married. I look like a cross between a hot-house poet and a gentleman wire-tapper. I wear horn-rimmed spectacles when I work, smoke cigarettes, and carry one glove in my left hand. Every time a check comes for a story I place that particular editor four notches higher than the Deity. After which I endorse the check. *Mort la ante!* (See above.) I've been in the insurance game, advertising, I've run the whole gamut of newspaper emotions, and when I get old I expect to smoke a corn-cob pipe and wear a knitted shawl.

Hopelessly yours, CLINT. STAGG.

INFORMATION DIRECTORY

IMPORTANT: Only items like those below can be printed—standing sources of information. No room on this page to ask or answer specific questions. Recommend no source of information you are not *sure* of. False information may cause serious loss, even loss of life. *Adventure* does its best to make this directory reliable, but assumes no responsibility therefor.

For data on the Amazon country write Algot Lange, care Explorers' Club, 345 Amsterdam Ave., New York City. Replies only if stamped, addressed envelope is enclosed and only at Mr. Lange's discretion, this service being purely voluntary.

For the Banks fisheries, Frederick William Wallace, editor *Canadian Fisherman*, 35 St. Alexander St., Montreal. Same conditions as above.

For the Philippines and Porto Rico, the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dep't, Wash., D. C.

For Alaska, the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For Hawaii and Alaska, Dep't of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For Cuba, Bureau of Information, Dep't of Ag., Com., and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

For Central and South America, John Barrett, Dir. Gen., Pan-American Union, Wash., D. C.

For R. N. W. M. P., Comptroller Royal North West Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can., or Commissioner, R. N. W. M. P., Regina, Sask. Only unmarried British subjects age 22 to 30, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs., accepted.

For Canal Zone, the Panama Canal, Wash., D. C.

For U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries, the Dep't of Com., Wash., D. C.

For Adventurers' Club, get data from this magazine.

For The American Legion, The Secretary, The American Legion, 10 Bridge St., New York.

AMERICANS, Canadians and all others who have lived in the North Woods will be interested in the letter that follows:

I like your "Camp-Fire;" its friendly warmth is cheering.

My experience of camp-fires began in Canada in the vicinity of Lake St. Francis, Eastern Townships. My father, manager for a big lumber company, I a boy of eight or nine.

There were no canned goods then; the menu was baked pork and beans three times a day. No stoves nor ovens; open-fire cooking, some dough bread—mostly biscuits and slapjacks; West India molasses

Digitized by Google

in lieu of butter; mess pork, boiled, baked with beans, fried. Fat boiled salt pork, cold, a loaf of bread and strong black tea were to most of the Canadian Frenchmen very good food to work on.

AFTER the picked-over white beans were parboiled so a bean was soft enough to mash between thumb and finger, the water was poured off, a good-sized chunk of fat salt pork, rind up, the fatty part nestled down into the beans (some cooks add a little mustard), a spoonful or two of molasses, then water enough to cover beans but not the slashed rind of the pork. The pot was then covered and lowered into a hole dug by the fireside, into which several shovelfuls of live coals had previously been put. The bean-pot was then covered with a liberal quantity of live coals and ashes and left to cook. Next morning the bean-pot would be excavated and the succulent contents, tin-dished out, pink, tender and whole, the pork a jelly, and, *tout ensemble*, a dish fit for the gods!

BY A somewhat similar baking method yellow corn-meal, flour and water, well sweetened with molasses, baked to a heavy consistency in tapered earthen pots, but, withal, very appetizing for hungry men.

I was young enough to know nothing of stomach troubles, yet to this day, sixty years after, my mouth waters when I think of those old-style-cooked pork and beans and brown bread.

But the boiled pork and beans of the mining camp-fire were mighty good, too, after a hard day's work with hammer and drill and pick and shovel.

Reminiscences of camp-fires in Eastern Canada, Nova Scotia, North Carolina, Georgia, Utah, Arizona and California crowd on my memory with now the color of romance, but which at the time seemed only the strenuous struggle for existence, from which I have never shaken myself free.—BEN TROVATO.

SOME time this Fall probably our old friend *Come-On Charley* will be appearing in the flesh on Broadway under the management of Jos. M. Gaites. It's part of the fellowship and friendly feeling of our Camp-Fire to be glad when one of the characters created especially for us by one of our own writers goes forth to win still other friends on the stage or between the covers of a book. Here's luck! Go and root!

LETTER FRIENDS

AT THE April Camp-Fire Mr. George H. Hicks, 3 Mt. Pleasant St., St. Johnsbury, Vt., said that as a result of fever contracted in the lumber business in the South and the West Indies he's now tied to a sick-room and wants to correspond with adventurers who are still roaming. We're going to start a "Letter-Friend" Department. It will work going and coming—for stay-at-homes who want adventurer letter-friends and vice versa. We publish names and addresses—the rest is up to you. Of course we can assure no responsibility of any kind. Women not admitted.

Here are three more names to start with. (2) A. I. Macdonald, 70 Church St., Springfield, Mass. (3) J. G. Leroy, care of Y. M. C. A., Brandon, Mass. (may have to have letters forwarded to Alaska). (4) E. Windle, Avalon, S. C. I., Calif., laid up by a lumber accident.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN.

WANTED —MEN

NOTE.—We offer this corner of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to our readers. Naturally we can not vouch for any of the letters, the writers thereof, or any of the claims set forth therein, beyond the fact that we receive and publish these letters in good faith. We reserve the privilege of not publishing any letters or parts of a letter. Any inquiry for men sent to this magazine will be considered as intended for publication, at our discretion, in this department, with all names and addresses given therein printed in full, unless such inquiry contains contrary instructions. In the latter case we reserve the right to substitute for real names any numbers or other names. We are ready to forward mail through this office, but assume no responsibility therefor. **N.B.—Items asking for money rather than men will not be published.**

PARTNER who would like to meet me some time during July in Vancouver. Must be young Englishman wishing to enter service of Great Britain; or if war is over, to go on exploring expedition, preferably to S. Africa, Asia or S. America. I am intimately acquainted with S. Africa; have received pay as expert rifleman in U. S. Army; can ride, swim, and am used to rough life. Am 22 yrs., 5 ft. 11½ in., 190 lbs.—Address W. No. 272.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

ONE or two men to accompany me this Spring on cross-country trip by wagon, camping as we go, and peddling to make living. I have done this and know it is successful. Am 43 years and single. Have had experience by river-boat also. Want partners who know something of this sort of life. Would like to hear from friends I have met.—Address IRA HUFFORD, 3601 W. 57th Place, Chicago, Ill.

PARTNER to travel for pleasure and adventure, prospect for gold, hunt, etc. Age, between 28 and 34 years. Some one who can hold his own in whatever may turn up, and if we see any prospects in any line to stay with it.—Address G. E. W., R. F. D. No. 8, Box 48, Alhambra, Cal.

PARTNER wanted for trip in Spring to exposition at Frisco. Small stake necessary. Am 22 years old. Overland going, ship back.—Address W. No. 271.

COMRADE to join ex-soldier on a trip from Boston to Kansas or Coast. Work our way. Must be of good character and habits. Write not later than June 1st.—Address "JIM" HENNESSEY, Malden, Mass.

PARTNER interested in taking up homestead among timber lands of Montana or Northern Idaho. Must be clean-minded and patient under the difficulties such a life might bring at start. Hardships are bound to arise. I am a Scotsman, 26 years old. In Canada four years and U. S. three. Physical culture enthusiast, 5 ft. 9½ in., 150 lbs.—Address ARTHUR S. FORD, R. F. D. No. 4, Spokane, Wash.

WOULD like to become acquainted with some Western ranch-hand, or cowboy, or civil engineer, trapper or any single outdoor man. Am a civil engineer, 21 years old. —Address JACK CONDO, General Delivery, Jeannette, Pa.

Inquiries for opportunities instead of men are NOT printed in this department.

PARTNER 18 to 22 years, unmarried, to take long hike through the South or Southwest. Must be good cook and know something about firearms and camp life.—Address LESLIE V. BLAND, 68 Jay St., Albany, N. Y.

PARTNER to go with me on prospecting trip to Guatemala. Must speak Spanish and pay his own expenses. —Address EMERY KOCH, 481 Minna St., San Francisco, Cal.

Digitized by Google

LOST TRAILS

NOTE.—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible.* All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right, in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada.

HOWLETT, H. J. called "Pete" by men of troop. Old pal and bunkie of M Troop, 4th U. S. Cavalry. Was discharged, Monterey, Cal., 1905. Heard he worked at depot in Ogden and Salt Lake City, Utah. Last heard of he was somewhere in the East or South; had taken up show-card writing, etc. 5 ft. 11½ in.; dark-brown hair; brown eyes; 160 or 170 lbs.; ruddy complexion; broad shoulders. Walked very erect; scar on inside left wrist, knife cut. Sometimes called "Rattlesnake Pete." Have good proposition for him with plenty of adventure in it.—Address L. T. No. 268.

MILLER, HENRY CHAPIN, father. Disappeared from Warrensburg, Mo., Fall of 1874. Not heard of since. Age, if living, about 65; birth-place Massachusetts. Had three sisters, Sarah, Jane and Ella, and a brother Charles. Would be glad to locate sisters also if still living. —Address MRS. FANNIE M. HELMICK, 526½ Second St., Webster City, Iowa.

CHILD, GEORGE, about 60 yrs.; 5 ft. 8 in.; strong build; gray eyes. Formerly one of best English swimmers. In American Navy 1876; vanished in Australia 1882. Found as baby wrapped in newspaper, Liverpool. Educated in Industrial School there. Later taken out and raised by my father, James Lloyd, of Birkenhead, Cheshire, England.—Address ROBERT LLOYD, Box 1164, Sacramento, Cal.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

BURKE, EDGAR, last heard from Winter of 1912-13, when he was in Hamburg, working for the H. A. P. A. G. in some capacity. He would now be about 26; medium height; very light hair; blue eyes. May be wearing a full red beard. Reward to any one locating this man, dead or alive.—Address CHRYSTIE MCCONNELL, Westerly Autogenous Welding Co., Box 392, Westerly, R. I.

LOCKARD, HARRY, my father, left Owing's Mills, Baltimore Co., Maryland, during the year of the World's Fair at St. Louis. 5 ft. 8 in. Last heard from him as a foreman construction gang McCammon, Idaho, two years ago, and later heard he was in Mexico. Have not seen him for twenty years.—Address ROBERT ST. CLAIR LOCKARD, 2740 North 15th St., Philadelphia, Pa.

WEINER, OSCAR, left home July 10, 1910, the day of his birthday and I, a heart-broken mother, have never heard from him since. He was 15 years old when he left and easily can be recognized by scars on his right and left temples.—Address MRS. S. WEINER, 739 Gates Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

CROCKETT, LOUIS HENRY, husband. Fair; age 35; 5 ft. 10 in.; 140 lbs. Last seen Boston, Mass. Summer, 1910, when 43rd Regiment of Ottawa, Canada, visited Boston. Any information, living or dead, would be appreciated by his wife.—Address MRS. I. CROCKETT, 165 Florence St., Ottawa, Can.

SHEA, W. A., age 24; 5 ft. 8 in.; dark hair and complexion; gray eyes. Scar on forehead. Last heard from Cement, near San Francisco, Cal. working as hotel porter. Also surveyor and lace-weaver.—Address M. M. SHEA, 520 Spruce St., Scranton, Pa.

O'FLAHERTY, JOSEPH H., last heard from San Jose, Cal. five or six years ago. Resided Woodland and Sacramento at different periods. Any information gratefully received.—Address A. B. O'FLAHERTY, 1912 River Ave., San Antonio, Texas.

ELLINGSEN, FRITHJOF, last heard of at Aberdeen, Wash., May 13, 1911, where he paid his dues to the Pacific Sailors Union of which he was a member. Born in Drammen, Norway, 1881.—Address HANS T. ELLINGSEN, 564 Broom St., Perth Amboy, N. J.

PITTENGER, FRED. Formerly of Fallbrook, Cal. Went to Alberta about eight years ago and took up some land there. Kept a restaurant and hotel along a new railroad. Later he ran a launch on Wolf Creek and Athabaska Lake. Last heard from August 1909.—Address MRS. WINNIE PITTENGER, Fallbrook, Cal.

COX, JOHN ARTHUR, last seen Jacksonville, Fla., 1909. Any one knowing whereabouts please write his mother.—Address MRS. F. COX, 5 Rhode Ave., St. Augustine, Fla.

GRAHAM, CHARLES A., 45 yrs.; 165 lbs.; 5 ft. 6 in.; gray-green eyes; scar follows left eyebrow; teeth good except for one; hair well mixed with gray when he disappeared. Believe he is married to Scotch girl named Agnes Cassie. He left Toronto, Aug. 1913. Probably follows either ice or painting and paper-hanging trade.—Address THOMAS E. GRAHAM, 243 Sackville St., Toronto, Ont., Can.

O'BRIEN, WILLIAM F., carriage-maker. Started West in 1892; later went to Klondike. Seen in Oakland, Cal. about twelve years ago; in Chicago about six or seven years ago. 6 ft. 1 in.; sandy hair and mustache; large teeth; blue eyes and had small piece taken out of right ear. Had four sons and one daughter.—Address JOHN H. O'BRIEN, 261 Winchester Ave., New Haven, Conn.

DORRITY OR DOUGHERTY, JOHN, uncle. Left Stewartstown, Tyrone, Ireland. Once employed at Central Post-office, Philadelphia. Last heard of 1891. Also worked as conductor on Pullman Palace Cars, Cincinnati district at that time.—Address JOSEPH JOHN NEESON, Gen. Del., Post-Office, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Can.

INGRAM, ROBERT W., Scotch; age 48; 6 ft.; 175 lbs.; partly bald; black hair; brown eyes. When last seen wore a Shrine button and 32nd degree Masonic ring. Last heard of El Centro, Cal. about April, 1914. Reward for positive information as to whereabouts.—Address ALLAN C. INGRAM, Box 273, Los Angeles, Cal.

Inquiries will be printed three times. In the January and July issues all unfound back names will be printed again.

CRONKHITE, N. I. W., last heard of twenty years ago in Montreal, Canada. Communicate with your youngest sister, care John Dore at the old home, or as follows—T. E. N. N. I. E., care *Adventure.*

BAGLEY, THOMAS H., last heard of Canton, Ill., coal mining. 54 years old; iron-gray hair and mustache; gray eyes; nearly bald. Usually superintendent of construction.—Address E. D. DEMENT, 74 6th St., San Francisco, Cal.

FULLMER, FRANK F., last heard of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan. Left me there to go to Edmonton, Alberta, or up in the Peau River district.—Address S. R. BEVIER, Carrier No. 6, care Post-office, Jackson, Mich.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

HAMMERSCHMIDT, RAIMUND, age 58; 5 ft. 10 in. Last heard from in Dallas, Texas, engaged in the saloon business. Please address his old friend from Caracas, Venezuela, S. A., where we parted in the Winter 1878.

STEVENS, MRS. J. S., of Brookville, Mass., please communicate regarding present to father during 1913. —Address WILLIAM H. HALPENNY, 442 20th Ave., E., Vancouver, B. C., Can.

MORGAN, WILLIAM HARE, brother. Last heard of Boulder, Wyo. Left there with saddle-horse and pack-horse to take up homestead in Canada. Mother died Dec. 29, 1914.—Address H. FRANCES SMITH, Pentwater, Mich.

WAGNER, RUDOLPH, (Ruddy,) of Newark, N. J. Would like to hear from you. Tried to locate you home and through Annie S.—Address H. K. BULL, 939 Telfair, Augusta, Ga.

DOWNY, STEPHEN, uncle, or any of his children. Formerly of Ohio, now believed living in Canada.—Address STEPHEN NEVILLE, 262 Iron St., Berwick, Pa.

GOGG, IKEY, last heard from in Portland, Ore., Dec. 1911. He is now 23 years of age.—Address MRS. ISAAC GOGG, R. D. No. 2, Belling Lane, Wash.

Digitized by Google

HULL, HARRY H., son, formerly of Winterset, Iowa. Went to Lacombe, Alberta, Canada, 1900. Attended Alberta College, Edmonton, 1906. Last heard of Vancouver, B. C.—Address A. W. HULL, Box 474, Minot, N. Dakota. Canadian papers please copy.

CULVER, BILLY. In Birmingham, Alabama, 1910. Will know me by reference to vaudeville team of Mathews & Graham; also Laundry Trust matter; also Woodlawn deal.—Address L. T. No. 269.

MORROW, JOSEPH, cook. Once worked out at the Farm, Toledo, Ohio. Has son named Daymon Morrow.—Address DAYMON MORROW, 122 Droegee St., E. Toledo, Ohio.

DARNSLEY, A. A., grandfather. In Louisville, Ky. ten years ago. About 63 years old now.—Address A. W. DEATRICK, 811 Topeka Ave., Topeka, Kansas.

DOUGLAS, FOSTER W., "Doug"; partner during 1913, prospecting in Arizona.—Address ALBERT D. SEIBERT, Box 321, Sharon, Mass.

KINZMAN, MARTIN, railroader, last heard of Chicago this Summer.—Address ROBERT F. CARSON, 250 Arlington Ave., Pittsburg, Pa.

HAYMAN, CHARLES FISHER, why do you not write or come home? We live at Newtown, Bucks Co., Pa. We are all living. I am married.—Address MABEL HAYMAN.

MULLEN, THOMAS, last heard from in Buffalo, N. Y. To your advantage to write.—Address L. T. No. 270.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

SAWYER, WALTER, last heard of in Beaumont or Orange, Texas, April or May 1913, with a W. M. Meador doing photo work.—Address C. N. H., care *Adventure.*

CROSBY, SI, my old pal, let me know where you are.—Address ERNEST L. FOSTER, same address as before.

DAVIS, EVA, adopted from Bayland Orphans' Home about 1893 by J. B. Keefe; last heard of at Beaumont, Texas. Any news thankfully received by sister.—Address MRS. EMMANUEL ROY, 575 East Stark St., Portland, Ore.

JACKSON, CLIFFORD P., communicate with the undersigned, giving account of yourself. Last heard from at Havana, Cuba.—Address ARTHUR K. MAGENNIS, Box 152, Edgewater, N. J.

JORDAN, JOHN, enlisted in the Navy, 1889 or 1890; about 16 years old. Letter from him stated he was at Naval Training Station Newport, R. I.—Address MRS. E. T. SINCLAIR, Box 148, Westhampton Beach, L. I.

JOHNSON, "BRANDY," want to hear from you. I am one of the two fellows who stopped at your place on Van Duzen River on way inland. Have news regarding the cinnabar.—Address CHESTER FLINT, 665 Chetwood St., Oakland, Cal.

COOKE, ALBERT, brother, last heard from at Christ Church, New Zealand, 1907. Native of Combe Martine, Devonshire, England.—Address PERCY COOKE, 170 Carver St., Pittsburg, Pa.

FRAGER, CLIFFORD, brother, last heard of in Foraker, Okla. 20 years old; tall and light-complexion.—Address MRS. ALICE SAVAGE, Gen. Del., San Francisco, California.

BENNETT, ROSS. Information wanted. Somewhere in New York City. Will hear something to his interest.—Address BENNETT HOUSE, Adirondack Mountains, New York.

SMITH, WILLIAM McK. Age 19; light complexion; sandy hair; 5 ft. 3 in. Last heard of Dec. 1914, Portland, Ore.—Address J. M. SMITH, care R. B. Wezerek, 5804 W. Erie St., Chicago, Ill.

DUGUAY, WILLIAM. Soldier was with Troop L, 11th Cavalry, U. S. A., Fort Oglethorpe, Ga. Last heard from in 1912, Birmingham, Ala.—Address GEORGE M. WELLER, JR., Box 35, Torrington, Conn.

RANDOLPH ATKIN H., Dalton Jack, S. N. Morgan, L. M. Reap, Robert O'Shea, J. A. Bertram, I. Williams, please send us your present addresses. Mail sent to you at addresses given us doesn't reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure.*

MANUSCRIPTS sent us by the following are being held by us, having been returned to us as unclaimed at the addresses furnished:

W. Lynch, Trenton, N. J.; Henry W. Edwards, New York; W. G. Gormley, Ontario, Canada; George Stillons, Chicago, Ill.; Francis Manston, Chicago, Cal.; James Perry, Brooklyn, N. Y.; A. P. Price, Ashton, Birmingham, England.

THE following have been inquired for in full in either the April or May issues of *Adventure.* They can get name of inquirer from this magazine.

ALLEN, ROBERT, barber; Armbruster, Joseph Anthony; Beaton, A. W.; Benson, Harry; Bergholen, Fred; Breed, Riley H.; Brown, Arthur, Oklahoma City; Brush, Don; Craft, James M.; Crompton, James; Cross, James Kenneth; Cross, Frederick, Dayton, O.; Daley, Walter, Tampico, Mex.; Davis, James P., Harper, Kansas, 1901; Digel, Julius C.; Eckles, Warren; Englehart, Adrian; Floyd, Harry; Foley, Mike L., Hugo, Okla.; Frazier, John; Frazier, Marion; Garrett, Wm.; Graham, Dan, Superior, Wis.; Greenwood, Charles; Growman, Harry; Heckenhauer, Karl H.; Hiyden, Charles; Jewell, Geo. H.; Jones, William H.; Kelly, Charles; Kennedy, George F., Marcus, Wash.; Koynors, C. H. (Spud); Luecke, J. F.; Luscumb, Ben; McBride, Douglas, called Andy Douglas in 1895.; McCormack, Mexico, 1912-13; Mason, Wm. J., Trenton, N. J. 1892; Maynell, Charles; Meek, Harold C.; Nicholson, Harry, A. or Nickerson; Parker, Ross, N. Dakota; Peralto, Jose L.; Radcliffe, Col. John (Jack) Stanley; Reed, Harry F., R. R. clerk; Rice, Mark (Serrott); Roberts, Joe, Chicago, Ill.; Schener, Nick; Stewart, W. J. (Bill); Stokes, P. A., Honolulu, 1911; "Struthers"; Sullivan, Frank, Australia; Sykes, Grover C.; Treasdale, A. (Weasel); Vanderdasson, Jim; Whittaker, Forrest Bennett; Will, John Andrew; Winsman, Harry; Wise, Johnny, baseball player.

NUMBERS 56, 68, 73, 76, W 93, W 107, W 140, W 150, W 153, W 183, W 184, W 189, W 195, W 203, W 211, W 212, W 215, W 231, W 250, W 254, C 189, C 198, C 205, L. T. 207. Please send us your present addresses. Letters forwarded to you at addresses given us do not reach you.—Address A. S. HOFFMAN, care *Adventure.*

MISCELLANEOUS. A. J. write mother and Adele; Comrades, 34th Inf., Co. B, Philippines, 1899; Members, Stanley-Pryce & Masbys outfits, lower California, 1910-1911. Jimmy Brew, Jess Howard, Little Mack and George Padgett, Chihuahua, Mexico, '07.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: As announced before, every item will be published three times, then taken out. But in the *January* and *July* numbers of each year we will publish the names of all who have been inquired for and remain unfound.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

In addition to those stories mentioned in our ad on page 2, the following are at present booked for the July issue, out June 3rd:

THE BLACK DEATH *By Marie Polk Angellotti*
A Sir John Hawkwood story of Italy.

THE PATCH *By Hapsburg Liebe*
Tennessee hearts amid Tennessee crags.

ON THE 'BAMTICOOK TRAIL *By Hugh Pendexter*
When the long, white trail turned crimson.

CONTRABAND *By Gordon McCreagh*
Holy Holly smuggles opium for the movies.

THE MAN-TRAIL *By Henry Oyen*
The conclusion of this forceful tale of the big North Woods, and the testing of a man.

Digitized by Google

In acting as the local magazine representative for his vicinity, Mr. Fred'k D. Webster, Penna., adds from $100.00 to $125 per month to his regular income. He has made a permanent side line of this work, from which he earns $1200.00 to $1500.00 a year—EXTRA.

Mr. Joseph Graham, a Canadian representative, has a business of his own to claim his attention, yet the subscription orders of his friends and neighbors, secured after ordinary business hours, yield him a profit of $40.00 a month in salary and commissions.

Mr. Harry H. Bushnell, another representative, is an insurance man. His subscription work is a side line. He meets the better type of business man, and capitalizes these meetings in his subscription work. In November and December, Mr. Bushnell earned $85.00 extra.

THERE IS MONEY IN ADVENTURE

IN EVERY city, town and village —ADVENTURE wants representatives. Clear-eyed, clean-cut men capable of looking after its subscription interests. Ambitious people, well-known and respected in their home community, who will forward to us the new and renewal subscriptions of their friends, neighbors and acquaintances.

To them ADVENTURE will pay a substantial monthly salary, in addition to a liberal commission- $5.00, $25.00, $100.00 or more, depending upon the amount of time devoted to its interests. As this work may be done in spare time— odd moments after regular business hours, evenings, holidays, etc.— it opens a splendid opportunity for a number of ambitious people to add materially to their present income. Perhaps it opens an opportunity for you.

We have prepared a little booklet which illustrates the advantages to be gained in this pleasant, profitable outdoor work. It shows what others have done, the extra money they have earned. It shows what you may do, in your spare time, without interfering in the least with your regular work.

A copy will be sent on request.

ADVENTURE

Spring and Macdougal Sts. New York

Digitized by Google

If You Took a German Soldier Home To-night

got him talking in front of the fire with a good cigar, he would picture the war for you—provided he had Ernest Poole's abilities—as Mr. Poole pictures it in EVERYBODY'S.

Mr. Poole comes fresh from the German trenches, and with a wholly new conception of what war is. He had pictured it brutal, debasing, bestial. But once out there in the German trenches, actually sharing the lives of the German soldiers, seeing with his own eyes the working of the organization of which they are a part, Mr. Poole found he did not know much about war —not much more, in fact, than you and I know about it.

He had read about it, of course, had drawn his own imaginary pictures of it, just as you and I have done. But real war—that was quite different! His preconceived notions exploded just as his article will explode our idea of war.

You will find "The Face of My Enemy" one of the most illuminating and graphic word-pictures you have read. Mr. Poole has caught the real spirit of War itself.

Everybody's Magazine for May

The Snarl of Waking Asia

"If to write truthfully about the possibility of war with Japan one has to write dangerously, that would seem reason enough for doing it."—GARET GARRETT.

Mr. Garrett writes about Japan. His article is truthful. It is comprehensive. It is—well, the things it discusses threaten to be more vital to the future of this country than any settlement involved in the present great European war.

Mr. Garrett knows Japan and the Japanese. He knows how strongly they feel. He knows why they feel strongly. He knows how important it is for this country to act—*and to act at once!* That is why this present time, serious as it is with hair-trigger possibilities, is the right time for him to deliver his message to the American people.

Every thinking man and woman in this country should make it their personal duty to read Garet Garrett's article.

Digitized by Google